

DEALING WITH DIVORCE

DIFFICULT ISSUES, BIBLICAL ANSWERS

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1. 7 Steps to a Successful Divorce

Let us begin with statistics about divorce in general.

- The divorce rate in America is roughly 40-50% based on current projections.
- According to researcher Jennifer Baker of Forest Institute of Professional Psychology, the divorce rate for first marriages is 41%, for second marriages is 60%, and for third marriages is 73%.
- According to sociologists, childless couples have a 66% rate of divorce.

The most disturbing statistic about divorce, however, is the one that sees conservative Christian groups with the highest divorce rate among religious groups, even higher than the divorce rate among atheists (Barna Group: Evangelical Christian Research and Survey Organization). After 38 years of ministry, I am sad to report that my experience in dealing with couples bears out the truth of these statistics. Unfortunately, when I look back over my own ministry, I see that even after having received counseling, more couples have decided to go ahead and divorce than remain married despite their problems.

If you look at the various websites that provide information on the causes for such an increase in the divorce stats, they will point to things like the rise of the number of women in the workforce, or the demands of two careers on families, or the facility and low cost of divorce itself.

One writer, in noting that the highest rates of divorce occurred in "Bible Belt" states like Oklahoma, concluded that the Christian religion was somehow to blame for the many broken marriages in America. My own theory is that people who divorce usually break the time-tested rules established by God for a happy and successful marriage.

This is why the title of this chapter is, *7 Steps to a Successful Divorce*. I have given it this title because it seems that people who end up divorcing, purposefully do all the things that will guarantee marriage failure while refusing to do the things that lead to success. So, if you want a successful divorce, here are the can't-miss steps you need to take.

Step #1 - Do Not Leave

In Genesis 2:24a the Bible explains the natural progression that takes place when two people are joined together in marriage and a new family unit emerges. It says:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother

The reason to leave father and mother is not because we have a job, we are old enough to make our own decisions or we disagree about things. There is a natural bond between parents and children that remains even when they become adults. However, when a son or daughter marries there is a leaving (Hebrew word here means to loosen or forsake) the parental bond in order to form a new bond or union with our spouse.

A successful divorce down the line, therefore, requires that you not leave your parents, but somehow graft them into your new union. Sometimes it is the child that does this by not taking on the role of husband or wife but simply treating the marriage like an extension of their parental family. Many times it is the parents who, with good intentions, interfere by not allowing their child or their child's spouse to form a completely independent unit.

There is a role for parents to play, but it is a supportive one, one of example and encouragement. However, too many young people marry and assume that their mothers will raise their children and their fathers will provide leadership and support, because they are too immature to

take on their own responsibilities for married life. In addition to this, too many parents enable their children's immaturity and self-centeredness out of a misplaced fear that they might suffer if they (the parents) do not smooth out every bump on the road of life.

44% of first marriages fail and one of the common denominators in these broken unions is the unwillingness of young people to leave and work out their married lives on their own. So, if you want a successful divorce, see to it that you do everything you can to manage your children's marriage relationship; and young marrieds, make sure you never leave home.

Step #2 - Do Not Cleave

That same passage in Genesis 2:24 goes on to say:

...shall leave his father and mother,
and shall cleave to his wife.

The word cleave means to cling or to stick to. For example, you are in a sailboat being tossed by 80 mph winds and huge waves, you cling (cleave) to the rail or main mast so that you will not be swept overboard. In a marriage, that cleaving is the creation of a special intimacy that no one can penetrate because it is off-limits to everyone else except the two partners. You create it though honest, constant, complete and loving communication.

A successful divorce, however, requires that you circumvent any attempt at clinging, cleaving or communication. Make sure that your spouse is the last to know anything that is going on. Always confide your feelings to your Facebook friends or co-workers instead of your spouse, and spare no effort to give your spouse the impression that they are not a priority.

Many cleave to their jobs, their cars, hobbies, friends, anything or anyone except the one that they originally left their parents in order to cleave/cling to. Successful divorcees report that the break-up was no big deal because they did not feel that they were very important anyways. Jesus said, "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"

(Matthew 6:21). If you want to succeed at divorce, work at making your spouse anything but your first priority in human relationships, and you cannot miss.

Step #3 - Do Violate (The One Flesh Principle)

In Genesis 2:24-25, the Bible says,

...and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This simple phrase encompasses the entire mystery, beauty and sacredness of the sexual relationship that takes place within the framework of marriage. It is within this one flesh union that the couple experiences its deepest feelings of love, intimacy, pleasure, reassurance and comfort. Author Tim Gardner in his book, *Sacred Sex*, (WaterBrook, 2002) says that sex is holy and is in some ways a foretaste of heaven. If this be so, those who seek to successfully divorce need to find ways to violate this one flesh principle.

In other words, try to add something else to the basic standard of one man bonded to one woman. For example, try bringing porn into the mix, or be unfaithful emotionally or physically with someone else. Perhaps you can use sex as a weapon or bargaining chip to get your way. By all means, make sure you always focus on your own needs first because every successful divorce has unfulfilled sexual needs as a basic component.

Step #4 - Do Not Multiply

The very first command God gave to man and woman was, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." (Genesis 1:28). Do you think there is any relationship between the fact that in American society women are having fewer children and having them later in life and the rate of divorce? In 2010 the United States recorded its lowest birthrate in a century, at 13 births per 1000 people (Huffington Post - 9/7/11). This is not enough to replace our population at the current level. This may be one reason that 66% of divorces happen to childless couples.

Successful divorcing requires a commitment to worldly things like careers, toys and self-fulfillment, not time-consuming things like children, family and home-building.

Step #5 - Do Not Submit

So far I have spoken in general terms about what either spouse can do to sabotage their marriage, but now I would like to get gender specific and start with the ladies. Girls, whatever you do, make sure that you undermine any attempt by your husband to take seriously what Paul the Apostle says in Ephesians 5:22-24:

²² Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

If your husband has any intention of becoming a spiritual or moral leader, or gives any evidence that he wants to serve as provider and protector, make sure you remind him that these are outdated ideas that have no place in today's real world. Let him know that no man will ever tell you what to do. Show him your paycheck as proof of your independence. Never let anyone see or even think that you count on him to lead you as well as your family. And if, perchance, he has many personal issues and weaknesses, and is not a natural leader, then do not encourage or facilitate his leadership. Rather, see to it that you step into the void and take charge yourself. Do not let an opportunity go by to remind him that he is not the leader and you are not in submission to him. And here is the tipping point, always broadcast these things to your family and friends so they are aware that you are not a woman in submission.

Follow these patterns of behavior and you will guarantee your unhappiness and eventual divorce.

Step #6 - Do Not Love

Is it not interesting that in the New Testament the only time God commands love within a marriage, it is to men?

²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;
²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church
- Ephesians 5:28-29

I do not know why only men are encouraged to love their wives as they love their own bodies. Maybe it is because He knows that sinful men's tendencies would be to love themselves first. A woman's nature draws her to sacrificial love as she bears and raises children. Men, on the other hand, have no such natural tendency. They have to learn it.

The successful divorced male, therefore, has to constantly give in to his natural inclination to use and consume. He must remain focused on himself and what makes him feel good. He needs to concentrate on what will satisfy and protect his fragile ego. He is required to invest in those things that will support his interior image of himself as a real man in a man's world. To successfully divorce he must avoid spiritual leadership by example, avoid claiming his rightful position in the family given to him by God, and avoid making any sacrifice of time, money, or effort that benefits only his wife or children and not himself.

Of course, not sharing his thoughts and feelings, getting angry when his sexual needs are not met, and assuming he is never at fault and never needs forgiveness are just bonus items that speed the divorce process along.

Married life, among other things, has been designed to teach men how to love. Refusing to learn this lesson is the fastest road to divorce.

Step #7 - Do Not Seek (Help)

I have given some general principles and some gender specific ones, and now one last idea intended for the couple. To make sure that there is no

chance that your marriage survives and spoils your divorce, do not get any meaningful help. God knows that when you take two sinful human beings and set them into a lifetime commitment of marriage there are going to be problems. This is why Paul spends a considerable amount of time in I Corinthians discussing the various issues surrounding trouble in marriage. He even gives counsel about what couples should do when things get really bad.

¹ Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. ² But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. ³ The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does

⁵ Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

- I Corinthians 7:1-5

Obviously, there were troubled marriages in the church at Corinth and the brethren sought help from the Apostle about these matters. But if you want to successfully divorce, why reach out for help? You might wreck your divorce. If you are serious about divorce then you will need to concentrate on ways of getting out of your marriage instead of ways of staying in your marriage. Another tactic to spoil any reconciliation would be to start a relationship with someone else instead of working on the one you have with your spouse. Perhaps you can round up a posse of people who can sympathize with you and make your spouse the common enemy. And, my personal favorite, tell everybody who is willing to listen what a lousy marriage you have.

Now, I repeat the essence of step seven, whatever you do, do not get qualified, certified, long-term help because it may just work and spoil the divorce. Of course, you can do what most people do to calm their conscience: visit your clergyman a few times once the marriage is terminal and see if he can perform a miracle in resurrecting a dead relationship. This will help in the future when people ask if you tried

counseling. You can say, "We even went to see our minister but it did not work." Under no circumstances, however, are you to try heroic measures to save your marriage in the way you would try to save your life if you had cancer. Successful divorces are difficult to accomplish in the face of six months of intense counseling with a professional therapist working with a couple determined to save their marriage.

SUMMARY

Well, there you have it, seven steps to a successful divorce: six do not's and one do.

1. Do Not Leave Parents: Allow them to interfere or replace your partner in priority.
2. Do Not Cleave to Your Spouse: Make sure to love something else first.
3. Do Not Violate the One Flesh Principle: Allow someone or something else to share your sexual intimacy.
4. Do Not Multiply: Make something else the focus of your married life other than family.
5. Do Not Submit: Follow the world's advice on the role of women instead of God's word.
6. Do Not Love: Refuse to be the sacrificial leader of your home.
7. Do Not Get Help: Look for excuses to break your vows instead of getting real help to keep them.

Of course, for the record, you know that the last thing I ever want for anyone is for their marriage to end in divorce. However, we have to realize that if we follow the steps that lead to divorce, this is where we will end up. It is amazing to me that year after year I see people who know the Lord, believe and know His word, refuse to follow His instructions in order to build strong marriages: do leave parents and cleave first and foremost to your spouse; Do not violate in any way the one flesh principle; Do multiply and build your marriage, home and

family on God's promises in His word; Do take on the roles assigned by God for men and women in marriage; When there are problems, do everything you can to heal your relationship.

Divorce is a terrible thing and quite painful as many who have been touched by divorce know. Thankfully we have the grace of God and mercy in the cross of Christ to wash away our failures and sins in every area of life, including the sin of divorce. But why go through the pain and heartache? Why risk our souls with such a sin? God's word tells us how to succeed at marriage, not divorce.

There are thousands of books and seminars each trying to explain how to have happy marriages, and I applaud these efforts. In the end, however, they all boil down to the simple things laid out in this chapter. God has not given us another plan.



2. What to do in Case of Divorce

PART 1

I think that it would be a fair guess to say that most people reading this book have been impacted by divorce in some way. Either it has happened to you and changes your life, or happens to someone close to you and affects your life. Now, we can have a long discussion about the evils of divorce, the biblical doctrine of marriage, divorce and remarriage, or how to avoid divorce, but we rarely talk about what we should do when divorce actually happens. It is important to know what to do because no matter what we think about divorce, it does happen. So here are some dos and don'ts that provide some guidance in the event of divorce (yours or someone else's).

In this chapter we will look at some of the things to consider when divorce happens to someone else, and in the next chapter I will do the same in the event that divorce is actually happening to you.

WHAT NOT TO DO IN CASE OF DIVORCE

Do Not Choose Sides

Divorce not only divides couples, it also divides families, friends and even churches. The division happens because people want to believe someone is right and someone is wrong in the divorce. Division also

happens because the individuals in the couple want and need support during this crisis, so they gather around them those people who will be sympathetic to their cause.

The problem with supporting one person over another is that it usually comes at the expense of rejecting the other party. People going through divorce want their supporters to be exclusive and loyal in their support which means no help or sympathy for the enemy. Of course, this is normal for close family and relatives who tend to "circle the wagons" when divorce happens. The problem grows when one side begins to recruit. In other words, we try to round up as many people as we can to support our cause, our rightness. Pretty soon everyone surrounding the couple finds themselves having to choose one side or the other, and neutrality is not an option. In the end this becomes a contest to see who can win the sympathy vote.

Of course, this type of strategy does not really help the couple or prevent the divorce. All it does is assign blame through a majority vote. The one with the greater number of sympathizers wins the blame game. In cases like this, guilt or innocence is based on the size of your group. The net result, however, is that many friendships and relationships become strained or broken in addition to the damage suffered by the divorcing couple themselves.

Do Not Think You Know Why

What is interestingly sad about divorce is that everybody thinks they know why it happened. Each person has a theory: she could not have children; he was always unfaithful; she was a nag, cold; he was selfish, immature; her mother interfered; he liked his buddies better etc. The truth of the matter is that no one outside of the marriage really knows, and many times even the partners within the relationship do not even know why their marriage is breaking up. In many instances they know they are unhappy or unfulfilled but cannot articulate the reasons why without the help of a third party. We like to think we know because it helps make sense of a bad thing or it provides us with a reason to assign blame.

I am not saying that you cannot know the reasons for the failure of a marriage, you can with time. But the reasons are usually more complex

and hidden than we think they are. A significant truth that I have learned in my years of dealing with people going through divorce is this: except in extreme cases where one partner is mentally unstable in some serious way (sociopath, abuser, etc.) both partners usually contribute significantly to their eventual divorce. And because we tend to avoid acknowledging our guilt to ourselves or others, it is very difficult to discern what each has done to undermine the success of their marriage. Most people I know who have gone through a divorce only realize the true "why" much later after they have matured, reflected and acknowledged their own failings in regards to their past marriage. This sometimes takes years, if ever, to take place.

Therefore, do not be too quick to decide and proclaim that you know why, because you really do not, and you are not helping when you say that you do.

Do Not Feel Superior

One reason why people often leave the church after they have been through a divorce is because they feel inferior among us. It is as if divorce was a sin greater or more heinous than other sins. Some who have gone through a marital failure have said to me that a divorce seems to relegate them to a position of second class citizen in the church. They are Christians yes, but merely tolerated, not embraced as equals. Of course, for this to happen there must already exist a sense of superiority by others who, by the grace of God, have avoided the particular sin of divorce.

It is normal, I suppose, to feel superior when you have succeeded at something that someone sitting next to you has failed at. When this happens the problem is that we are comparing ourselves to each other instead of comparing ourselves to Christ. When we do this we risk feeling superior or inferior. When we compare ourselves to Christ, however, we can only feel grateful. This is because despite our obvious sinfulness in comparison to the Lord, we see in His cross the mercy and grace He offers, and this brings feelings of relief, joy and peace, not feelings of superiority or inferiority.

When you see the divorced person, therefore, do not feel superior. It may well be that their righteousness is greater than yours in other areas

of life and service to God. Remember that in God's eyes, all have sinned and fallen short of His glory.

for all have sinned and fall short of the
glory of God,
- Romans 3:23

To feel superior is a sign of pride. It is also a tool of the devil to cause division in the church and discourage the faith of those who have failed in marriage.

Of course, there are many other things to avoid that I could list given enough time and paper. For example:

- Do not gossip about the situation because this only spreads the division to more people. Gossip never helps!
- Do not judge the people involved. There will be a judgment, but God will do it and it will be accurate and fair.
- Do not play marriage counsellor. Just because you drive a car does not mean you are a mechanic and can diagnose and repair it properly. In the same way, just because you are married or have been through a divorce does not qualify you to be a marriage counsellor telling people how to live their lives or fix their problems. You can certainly offer an opinion or share your own experiences, this is good. But people are extremely vulnerable when going through a divorce and need qualified help. Therefore, be careful not to try to become an "authority" on marriage or an "expert" on divorce when you are neither. Best intentions do not qualify a person to help someone deal with a crisis. If not careful, you can make things worse, not better.

In my ministry, I try to match couples having problems to the type of professional counselors that would best assist them since I am not formally trained in these areas. I realize that as a minister I have a role to play in providing spiritual guidance and encouragement in time of need. But I let the people trained in marriage crisis do their work because I want my brethren to receive the best care possible. Many

times the most helpful thing I or you can do is convince people to get professional help when their marriage is in trouble.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF DIVORCE

We are not completely helpless when others are going through a divorce. There are things we can and should do.

We Should Pray

Let's face it, we do not know what is really going on, we should not pick sides, and may not be qualified to give advice, but the powerful avenue of prayer is always open to us. I believe that many marriages fail because there is not enough prayer invested in them by the couple or those around them. If we spent less time gossiping about the situation and more time in prayer about it, this would create a more positive impact. If you are not sure about this, simply measure the amount of time you have spent talking about the problem to others (which has zero positive effect) and how much time you spend in prayer to God about it (who has the power to change things). Jesus promises that prayer will yield results, "Ask, and it will be given to you..." (Matthew 7:7). Why do we not take Him at His word? Constant and fervent prayer by the people around the couple and the couple themselves would do more to save the marriage than taking sides, gossiping or assigning blame.

We Should Really Listen

The time to avoid the divorce is before the break-up, not once the lawyers are involved. By this time we are playing catch-up and people have usually made up their minds. Some go to counseling after they have begun divorce proceedings, but usually it is to calm their guilt concerning what they are about to do. They want to be able to say, "I tried everything."

Divorce can be headed off if we pay attention to what unhappy couples are saying to us long before the break-up. For example, continued complaints and putting down of the other spouse; expressions of sorrow, unhappiness and depression; decrease in noticeable affection, joy and wanting to be together; jokes about lack of sex, fun or intimacy; financial problems; decreased spiritual commitment by one or both

partners. If you are paying attention you will notice these types of things and if you hear them, do something about it. Sometimes just asking if everything is ok can begin a series of conversations at a time when something can actually be done to help before it is too late.

Jesus said, "...What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." (Matthew 19:6). We seem to think that God is saying that it is impossible to fail in marriage because He has blessed it and made it special. But what God is saying is that we should not separate, and it is against His will, but not that it is impossible to do.

If we listen to what people say maybe we can help them avoid this all too common sin. Sometimes listening is the greatest service we can provide. And listening often leads to praying which is always the first step in the healing of any relationship.

Love Both Partners

When I do pastoral counseling with a couple, my personal objective is to love both people in the marriage. This is not always easy because sometimes one partner may be harder to love than the other. For example, the husband cheats on his wife with a younger woman and leaves her with two teenagers to raise by herself. A first impulse in a situation like this may be to take that old boy behind the woodshed and beat some sense into him. But this would neither solve nor change anything.

In this instance, she needs love to be able to deal with the hurt she feels and the different situation she is now in, and he also needs love because this will be the only way to keep the lines of communication open with him. Loving her does not mean you believe she is absolutely innocent or right in all of this, it means you are meeting her need for comfort and encouragement at a difficult moment. Loving him does not justify or excuse what he has done, it means you still care for him as a person and have not abandoned him.

If these two ever get back together again (and they often do) they will remember who loved them when they needed it most. And if they do not, then your love will help heal the wounds caused by their failed relationship and subsequent divorce. She will know that when she

needed it most, your love was there. He will know that even when he did not deserve it, your love was there. Who knows, maybe it will be your love that will give him the courage to admit his sin and be restored to God, even if his wife will not take him back.

Love will not guarantee that you will save the marriage, but it may help save his soul, save her self-esteem, save each from further damaging their family, and save relationships beyond the couple like children, parents, friends, brethren and co-workers. You may not be able to force the partners going through a divorce to love each other, but you can make sure that you love them because you know that no matter what is happening, God still loves them.

SUMMARY

Preacher and teacher, Jerry Jones, does a marriage seminar where the publicity materials have the following tag line, "All marriages end in either death or divorce." He is a widower and his wife is a divorcee so they teach from both perspectives. This saying is true when you think of it, even if it is not a happy thought.

In this chapter I have wanted to emphasize the fact that sooner or later most people will be affected by, confronted with or the victim of divorce in some way. It is not right, it is not ideal, it is not what God wants for us, but it is what often happens. When it does happen, therefore, remember: do not pick sides, think you know why, feel smug, gossip, judge, or play counselor. All of these are counterproductive.

If you truly want to help: pray fervently, listen attentively and love graciously. Doing these things may heal the marriage and will certainly lessen the destruction and pain suffered by all concerned.

3.

What to do in Case of Divorce

PART 2

In part one of this section entitled *What to do in Case of Divorce* I talked about what to do when divorce happens to someone around you; the dos and don'ts of crisis management when a divorce takes place. In this chapter I want to review the dos and don'ts when divorce is actually happening to you.

The last thing people hope for when they get married is the failure of their marriage, but it happens. We know that it occurs at a higher rate among those who are non-religious, those who are unfaithful as Christians, or those who do not practice the faith they were taught as children. But sincere believers who are faithful and active in the church also experience divorce, less often of course, but it still happens.

Again, we could talk about the issue of marriage and divorce and remarriage, who is guilty or who is innocent, who can remarry or not, but these are topics that will be covered later on in this book. This chapter is about managing the crisis of divorce, whether you like it or not and, whether you agree or not. And divorce is present, even in the church, even in the lives of sincere Christians who love the Lord. For example, your spouse leaves you and sues for divorce because she just does not want to be married to you anymore; your spouse abuses drugs, abuses you or the children, etc., and this leads to divorce; your child dies tragically and this leads to the destruction of your family; your spouse refuses to have sex with you for years, and this leads to divorce. I can

continue here with many more scenarios taken from real life experiences in my years of ministry, but I think we get the point by now.

Please do not misunderstand, I am not saying that these things justify divorce, I am simply saying that divorce happens to people even when they are trying their best. Divorce is the result of some kind of failure in marriage, and failure is a form of sin. Even if we do not want to sin, as Paul says in Romans 7:19, sometimes we sin anyways.

THE DO NOTS AND DOS OF DIVORCE

A. Do Not Let Divorce Define Who You Are

Some people carry the "D" word on their foreheads for the rest of their lives. They allow failure in this one area to define their personalities. It is like those who have been convicted of a felony and sent to prison, even after their release they are permanently seen as ex-cons. In much the same way, divorced people continually see themselves through the prism of their divorce. Unfortunately, in the church we often reinforce this identity by creating Bible classes and social activities just for them or we subtly let it be known that divorced people will not be allowed to serve in any meaningful way because they are "damaged goods."

Defining ourselves by our failures in anything leads to low self-esteem, as well as the inability to experience joy (we think we do not deserve it). In addition to this, defining ourselves by our failures often leads to a higher susceptibility to sinfulness and worldliness because we do not quite fit in at church so we seek satisfaction and acceptance from the world. The problem with divorce is that it is a very public failure so we can never get away from it, and our failure is reinforced by others in the way they treat us, a reaction that can vary from sympathy to cold rejection.

What We Should do is See Ourselves as Christ Sees Us

We should not see ourselves through the view of our failure or other people's perception of us, but rather through the vision of the cross. If there is one good thing about divorce, it is that it will bring you to your knees before the cross of Christ in a hurry. It is impossible to feel self-

righteous after you have been through a divorce, whether you are the so-called guilty or innocent party.

Paul the Apostle gives the true vision of our new identity in I Corinthians 6:9-11:

⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Notice that he does not mention divorce here because it usually is a result of these other sins, and this is not an exhaustive list of sins anyways. Note that the sins he does mention are in many ways more shameful than divorce. But what does Paul say to these people about what they should do? He tells them not to define themselves by their old selves but rather by their new selves in Christ. This new vision sees them as:

1. Cleansed/washed - Forgiven
2. Holy - Special and set apart for God
3. Righteous - Acceptable to God

If you see yourself in this new way and act according to this new vision, your feelings about yourself will follow. Divorce has not changed your status with God. You are still washed/holy/righteous because of the cross. You still have access to the throne of grace through prayer despite sin and failure.

⁷but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive

us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

- I John 1:7-10

The cross of Christ is over us, even in failure, because our failure was the reason He died on it (to pay the moral debt to God caused by our sins and failures). The big difference is that when divorce happens, we may become more aware of our need for God's grace than ever before. This is the blessing that comes in the wake of our tears.

Therefore, do not define yourself by failure, define yourself by the vision of the cross.

B. Do Not Punish Yourself

The role of judge and punisher belongs to God (Romans 12:19), even when the person is yourself. I have found that in many instances both partners punish each other following a divorce. At times the guiltier of the two tries to make amends in some way. They overindulge their kids, they reinforce their low self-esteem with criticism of themselves and, of course, they define themselves by their failure. The innocent or less guilty partners, on the other hand, punish themselves with regret and self-doubt (what did I do wrong?), they wallow in self-pity, anger and resentment long after this phase of grief should be over. They also doubt that the Lord really loves them (because if He did, this would not be happening to them, right?).

I have noticed that there are plenty of people and circumstances that will punish you for your divorce. For example: loss of income, emotional trauma, breaking-up of your home, loss of your friends, prestige, career mobility, and possible rejection from family and church. These are only a few of the negative things that will confront you as a divorced person, therefore, there is no need to add more punishment to the mix by beating yourself up.

Instead of Punishing Yourself, Help Yourself

Do those things that will minimize the damage to yourself and your family. For example:

Protect Yourself Legally

Divorce is a legal action that reverses the contract made in marriage. Some think that the legal action is the sin, but the sin comes long before the divorce papers are signed. The breaking of the covenant (adultery) between a husband and wife takes place in a number of ways as one or the other unties the knot that binds them in marriage. Jesus did not say that people could not divorce, He said they should not do this and they sin when they do (Matthew 19:6).

However, when the covenant is broken for whatever reason, it is naive to think that legal matters will resolve themselves, especially when children, a family home or a business is involved. I encourage people to minimize the financial trauma to themselves and their family by having someone else mediate the legal actions involved in divorce. This should be a person who wants to protect you and also do what is best for your family. Seek out a lawyer or mediator who is not only out to win or exact revenge, but someone who has a longer range view of how life plays out after divorce and can guide you accordingly.

Guard Your Faith

When a people of faith are going through a divorce it is important that they reach out to those in the church who can minister to them and their family at a time of crisis. They need to seek out those people who will pray with them and for them, and can give counsel as well as keep them spiritually accountable. Divorce often separates people from the body of Christ, so it is important for them to be proactive in guarding their faith.

Unfortunately, elders and ministers are not always helpful during these times because some are more concerned about the doctrinal fall-out of the divorce issue and less focused on helping folks who are suffering. For example, a patient is brought in with a gunshot wound sustained in a bar-room fight. At the moment the doctor's job is to stop the bleeding and save the patient's life, not point out that drinking alcohol is immoral, hanging out in bars is unchristian, and fighting other drunks can be dangerous, especially if they are packing guns. There will be plenty of time for scolding if the patient recovers. In the same way, we (who minister) have to remember that people who are going through divorce have sustained a serious emotional and spiritual wound, one that can ruin their lives and their faith. Our immediate task is to save the patient.

If we do that, we may then have a chance to help them change the things that led to their marital failure in the first place.

C. Do Not Try to Justify Yourself

The natural tendency of our sinful human nature is to rationalize, excuse or justify our bad behavior. Don't do it!

When there is a divorce, it is the result of a failure in marriage, and when a marriage fails there is enough blame to go around. Of course people try to justify themselves in the church because we use the terms guilty or innocent party in the divorce equation. It is true that in a divorce one party may be guilty of breaking the marriage covenant or the one to actually seek to obtain a legal judgment of divorce, but this does not mean that the other party is completely innocent in the matter.

When we try to justify our behavior in the divorce process we damage ourselves in several ways without knowing it:

- Our sense of self-righteousness prevents us from learning anything from the failure of our relationship. We may be the innocent party and consequently think that we have nothing to change or learn.
- We will never be free or have a clear conscience. Most people try to justify themselves because they are too proud to admit fault or they are afraid that people in the church will reject them if ever they remarry, because for many, only the innocent party can remarry in good conscience. While justifying ourselves may work with others and our outward selves, our conscience and spirit usually suffer when we do this. The fallout from this false sense of rightness is usually a loss of faith, or we become invisible in the church (we are there but not active), or we go to the other extreme and become super-servants trying to work off our secret guilt.

In all of these scenarios the short-term gain (acceptance through self-justification) is not worth the long term pain of fear, loneliness, nagging guilt and dread. And these feelings are all present because we have tried to justify ourselves when faced with the failure of our marriage.

Do Cast Yourself on the Mercy and Grace of God

When Jesus says:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

- Matthew 11:28

And when Paul says,

casting all your anxiety on Him,
because He cares for you.

- I Peter 5:7

What burdens, what worries and what cares do you think they are referring to? Money? Food? Illness? Yes, these basic things of course, but surely both Jesus and Peter are also talking about the burdens of sin and failure, the worry of a guilty conscience and the concern for our souls. In this context, divorce is just one more sin, one more failure in an imperfect life as flawed human beings. The only way to be free from the crushing guilt and sadness, the only way to be released from the resentment, anger and regret is to lay this burden down at the cross of Christ, not try to carry it alone through the power of self-justification. This only leads to more failure. The only solution is to throw yourself upon the grace and mercy of Jesus.

For those who are not Christians, the good news is that all sins and failures are washed away in the blood of Christ as you are baptized in His name (Acts 22:16). This means that when you repent (not justify) of your sins and confess your faith in Christ, you leave your sins and their eternal consequences buried in the waters of baptism (Acts 2:38).

And for Christians, the Good News continues to be good because the stain of sin and failure in their lives is continually cleansed if they acknowledge their sins and cling to the cross through faith in order to maintain their righteousness (I John 1:6-8), and not try to establish their righteousness by claiming innocence through manipulation of the Law or God's word. This was the error of the Pharisees who thought they were righteous because they provided a legal document to divorce their wives but were guilty of the greater sins of lust and disloyalty which

were the real reasons for the putting away of their spouses. Or the modern-day legalists who think they do not need God's mercy because they did not initiate legal proceedings in the divorce but if the truth were known, are guilty of 1000 acts of neglect that ultimately led to the death of their marriage.

When it comes to divorce, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). There may be one party more guilty than the other, but I submit to you that for the healing process to begin, both parties need to seek out God's mercy and grace.

SUMMARY

Please do not think that I am an advocate for easy divorce. I am not. It is a serious sin, denounced by God (He hates divorce - Malachi 2:16). Except for extreme cases involving abuse, abandonment or sexual infidelity, divorce does not solve problems, it actually creates more problems. In addition to this, divorce leaves a permanent scar on your soul that is felt for a lifetime. Therefore, I do not advocate divorce. I hate it and see it for what it is: a sin, a failure, a victory for evil and a destructive power.

However, I am also a realist and recognize that human beings sin and will do so until the end of time when Christ will come and equip us with sinless bodies. Until that time, as a minister of the gospel who deals with all kinds of sin including the sin of divorce, I offer the only solution God has provided for sin: the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the solution to divorce, not self-pity, not self-punishment, not self-justification, but forgiveness and mercy through the cross of Christ for every sinner who comes to Him in faith and repentance, and that includes those who sin through divorce. This is why the gospel is called the Good News, because for the one who has failed at marriage, knowing there is forgiveness and the offer of renewal is very good news indeed!

4.

The Marriage Bed

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, here in the U.S. the number of live births to single mothers in 2015 was 1,606,870. This number represents 40% of all babies born in this country. It seems that this group grows larger year by year as families break up, as parents abandon their marriages, as children are born to parents who are not married and do not intend to be married. There are less fathers and mothers caring for their own children even though children continue to be born, because more and more people do not know or care about God's commands concerning sex, and the births that result from it.

DEFILING THE MARRIAGE BED

There are many passages in the Bible dealing with sex, but one verse summarizes well God's will for our sexual activity.

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled;
- Hebrews 13:4^a

Note the instructions here.

Marriage is to be held in honor among all.

God's view of marriage (one man, one woman for life) is to be respected not just by Christians but by everyone. This means that laws established to permit homosexuals or lesbians to marry are wrong in God's eyes. This also means that parents are to accept and respect their children's marriage and not manipulate to change or to hurt it. This means that the

marriage bond is not to be broken or attacked by outsiders, and that all are to respect their own vows within this union.

Marriage is something that God has created for mankind and this institution should be protected and respected by everyone.

The marriage bed is not to be defiled.

The marriage bed refers to the intimacy of the couple which includes their sexual relationship. This relationship should not be defiled, this is God's command. The author goes on to mention two ways that this relationship is defiled (made dirty or impure).

1. Fornication

The Greek word translated into the English word fornicate refers to someone who indulges in illicit sex. This is sexual activity outside of marriage (includes homosexuality, pornography, heterosexual activity before one is married). It is interesting to note that the writer says that fornication (or sex outside of marriage) spoils or defiles sex within marriage. We are 2000 years later, and psychologists tell us that much of the dysfunctional sex within marriage can be traced to sexual activity that has taken place before marriage.

2. Adultery

Adultery is when a married person has sex with a person other than their spouse. Nothing kills a marriage faster than unfaithfulness, so much so that Jesus gave this as an exception to the rules on divorce (Matthew 19:9). When I counsel people who have done this, they give reasons why they have cheated (it just happened; I did not mean for it to happen; I love this other woman/man; my wife/husband does not understand me). Of course, these are just excuses to cover the real reason for their adultery (they did not pay enough attention to their partners; they allowed themselves to get too close to some other person; they did not deal with their lust right away thinking they could "handle it"; they did not stop until they got caught or got to the point where they hated their spouse). Whatever the reason or failing, adultery destroys the marriage bed and few marriages survive it. As a matter of fact, few

marriages that are a result of adultery are healthy because they are built on the ruins of a previous marriage.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFILING THE MARRIAGE BED

The Hebrew writer not only establishes the institution of marriage as holy and lists the things that defile it, he also warns of the consequences.

for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.
- Hebrews 13:4^b

Note that both fornicators and adulterers will be judged. Our society today makes a distinction between these two sins. Adultery, cheating on your spouse, is still seen as wrong. For most people it is still unacceptable to be unfaithful to your partner. Fornication, however, is ok as long as it is consensual and you are careful not to contract any diseases or get pregnant. Therefore, having sex before marriage is fine, as is living together before marriage. People wholeheartedly approve of homosexuality and lower their standards on books, movies, etc., because society says that these things are all acceptable.

In light of these attitudes, I have a question for us to consider: Since when has social custom replaced God's word? For example, it was custom for the Canaanites to sacrifice their babies, did this make it ok? It was custom for the Greeks to enjoy pedophilia (sex with children), did this make it ok? It was custom for the South to own and trade slaves 150 years ago, did this make it ok? It is now custom to have sex before marriage, to live together before marriage, to have children without being married. Does this make it ok, just because it is custom or socially acceptable?

As Christians we have to make up our minds once and for all. Is our conduct (especially our sexual conduct) going to be guided by custom, by what others do, by what we feel like, or will it be guided by God's word? Society says that sex between any two free consenting adults is fine and nobody's business. The Bible says, "Let [...] the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers will be judged." Not only is there a directive as to when sex should take place, there is also a warning that those who violate this command will be judged and punished.

In this verse the Hebrew writer does not give the details of what the punishment will be, but Paul does in I Corinthians 6:9:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals..."

As Christians we understand that those who refuse Christ and do not obey His gospel will not be saved. But Paul warns that even Christians who revert back to unchristian behavior will also be condemned.

Christians living in the Roman Empire during the first century were sorely tempted to be sexually impure. They lived in a wicked and sexually depraved society. Many came from pagan backgrounds where sex was used in their religious rituals. Because most were slaves they were subject to sexual advances of their masters or to use sex in order to gain favor. Today, we live in a different society but the temptation to be sexually impure is just as great. Actually, we live in a sex-saturated society where the level of sexual morality is low. There is very little encouragement by leaders to be pure sexually. Many churches are lax in speaking out against impure sexual practices going on in their congregations, and several denominational churches openly embrace and promote practicing homosexuals for ministry and church leadership. Make no mistake, however, God's word means the same as it did then. God will punish fornicators and adulterers.

HOW TO KEEP THE MARRIAGE BED UNDEFILED

Remaining sexually pure or regaining sexual purity is difficult but not impossible. With this in mind, I want to describe different ways to help make your marriage bed holy and acceptable to God, and totally undefiled for you and your partner because an undefiled marriage bed is key for a happy marriage.

1. Commit Yourself to Personal Sexual Purity

Impurity, sexual uncleanness, fornication, adultery, all of these things happen gradually in our lives as we lower our standards, develop bad habits and friends, and consume improper sexual material. The first step to sexual purity is a commitment that what you think, what you dwell on

in your heart, what you say and do and allow others to do will be pure sexually and acceptable to God on His terms, not yours. This means that you commit yourself to the boundaries that God has established concerning sex. For example, impure thoughts, when they come, float through your mind and do not become permanent guests. This means that if you are not married, you do not engage in sex with another, whether it is foreplay or intercourse; and if you are married, your total sexual experience is focused on your spouse, no one else, real or imaginary. Personal sexual purity requires that if you are engaged or in love, you wait until you are married before living together or having sex.

Some think that getting married or engaged erases the fornication that takes place before marriage. The only thing that removes sin is repentance and baptism for the non-Christian, or repentance and prayer for the Christian. I tell Christian parents and young people not to ask me to perform their weddings if they choose to have sex or live together before marriage and refuse to repent of this before the actual wedding. Getting married is a good thing and setting a better course than living together or having casual sex, but it does not deal with the sexual sins that come before it. As Christians we must deal with our sins, whatever they are. John says,

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- I John 1:8-9

People who live together, have sex before marriage and then get married thinking that the wedding takes care of everything are deceiving themselves. If you come to me in this situation I will ask you to deal with your sin first, and not continue in it, then we will plan the marriage. Why? I want your marriage bed to be undefiled when you enter into it.

2. Seek a Like Mate

In II Corinthians 6:14, Paul says that believers are not to be yoked or teamed up with unbelievers. He lists several reasons, but all of them point to the same idea: non-believers are different than we are,

especially when it comes to the marriage bed. Two Christians who are committed to personal purity will have a better chance of maintaining sexual control and a faithful marriage bed than a mixed couple where the non-believer uses society's standard for sexual conduct. Marriage does not transform a fornicator or an adulterer, they just bring their sins into the marriage bed with them.

3. Ask for Forgiveness

I realize that for many, this lesson comes after the fact. You may be single but have already lost your virginity. Some may be into second or third marriages. And there are those who have cheated, had children out of marriage, lived together before marriage, and the list of sexual sins goes on and on. You may be asking, "How do I commit to personal purity; how do I purify my marriage bed this far down the road?" Thankfully, we have a God who is not only merciful but who can make straight what is crooked, make whole what is broken and make pure what has been defiled by sin.

In I Corinthians 6:11, Paul, in talking about fornicators, adulterers and other sinners says,

Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

What we cannot do with any amount of trying, God can do through His mercy and grace. For those who have managed to keep themselves sexually pure, He can help maintain that state and guide them to a marriage bed that will be joyful and undefiled. For those who have sinned, who have failed, who have spoiled what was meant to be clean and holy, He can restore to a pure status through the blood of Christ, accessed by the non-Christian through repentance and baptism and renewed by the Christian through confession and prayer for forgiveness. God's forgiveness cleanses sexual sins, purifies the conscience and makes holy the marriage bed defiled by sin.

5.

Domestic Violence: The Secret Sin

PART 1

One of the major fallacies that we in the church seem to live with is that there is no family violence that takes place in the marriages of people who are professed Christians. Of course, when everyone is singing *Amazing Grace* on Sunday morning there is a picture of unity and peace as all gather cheerfully for worship. But I can tell you that once worship is over many wives and children go home to a situation of abuse that stays hidden because of fear or shame.

In this series on dealing with divorce, I want to include two chapters that address one of the least talked about causes of divorce: domestic violence. In this and the following chapter I will try to do three things:

1. Provide some basic education on the subject of abuse.
2. Share some practical information in order to help those who have to deal with abuse in their own lives.
3. Look at what the Bible teaches concerning abuse and what abuse can do.

Hopefully, those who might be experiencing abuse in their family situations will find help and hope.

DEFINITIONS

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is that violence which occurs between partners or between children and adults in an ongoing domestic relationship. For the purpose of this book, however, I will focus on the violence that occurs between adults. Child abuse is an entirely separate issue with different causes and patterns. Most (adult) domestic violence is directed against women, although there are some cases where it is the man who is abused. Again, for the purpose of this book, I will focus on the violence directed against wives by their husbands because this is the type of aggression in 85% of reported cases.

National Statistics

A simple review of available statistics reveals disturbing facts about domestic abuse in the state of Oklahoma (where I live and work). For example, in 2015 police responded to 36,000 domestic violence calls alone. This represented 33% of all calls. Another frightening number is that 44% of all homicides were due to domestic violence. Also, in 70% of cases where an abused child dies, there has been a pattern of abuse against the mother as well. These few statistics from only one state in our country confirms that domestic violence is with us, is wide-spread and a growing problem.

Battered Wife Syndrome

BWS is a situation where a woman experiences repeated, deliberate and severe abuse resulting in physical and emotional injury. Abuse against women in the home is present in various forms:

1. **Physical Abuse:** Pushing, slapping, kicking, punching, striking with a weapon.
2. **Emotional/Psychological Abuse:** Threats of violence or death, verbal abuse (name calling, accusations, ridiculing), manipulation, domination, outbursts of anger, isolation.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Marital rape, sadism, forced sexual activity, degradation.

A battered woman is a person who experiences any one or combination of these things. In most cases there is a cycle of violence that increases and intensifies over the years.

Batterers

Batterers are men who abuse their wives physically, emotionally or sexually. Batterers have a certain profile or common set of characteristics. For example they are/have:

- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty trusting others
- Little ability to nurture others
- Perfectionists
(usually clean-cut types and hard to spot outwardly)
- Fear the loss of control
- Out of touch with feelings other than anger,
and tend to hold in emotions
- Dual personalities
- Jealous and possessive
- Unable to assume responsibility for their actions,
blame the wife or others
- All ages, nationalities, social positions
- Believe in male superiority and dominance
- History of alcohol and drug use in self or family
- History of abuse in self or family
- Over-sensitive to insults or neglect

Of course, not every batterer has all of these characteristics, but most of them have a cluster of these in their personality profile.

WHY DO PEOPLE BEHAVE VIOLENTLY IN MARRIAGE?

Most of us believe that people marry because they love each other and want to be together. Why then is there such a degree of violence in marriage, even in Christian marriages? Some recent research provides several suggestions as to the cause of domestic violence.

Previous Family Learning

Children who observe this kind of thing in their homes while growing up will more likely incorporate it into their own lives when they marry. For example, a girl repeatedly seeing her mother slapped and pushed by her father (without any intervention or change as a result of this kind of abuse) may find this behavior normal or familiar if it happens in her own marriage, and not seek to respond or challenge her mate when this takes place.

Low Self-Esteem

Researchers do not know why, but husbands with low self-esteem seem to revert to violence against their wives more easily than those who have a better view of themselves. Many batterers say that they were violent because their wives threatened their self-esteem in some way.

Displacement of Tension

The husband takes out his stress from work, failure, fear, etc., on his wife and children in this way. The abused spouse may be blamed for her husband's failure or stress, and both may use this explanation as a way of rationalizing this behavior so as to avoid confronting the truth that one is an abuser and the other permits herself to be victimized without consequences. In this way both partners believe that they are preserving their home and keeping this situation hidden from parents, friends and church members.

Reinforcement of Violence

If the batterer succeeds in getting his way through violence, he will use it again. When the use of violence allows the batterer to maintain control, he will use it repeatedly.

No Referee

Marriage is private and the abuse is rarely seen or checked by some objective observer. When there is no restraint then batterers feel free to use violence without interference.

Violence in Society

Social models for violence on TV and in movies create a norm for violence in society. People become desensitized to violence in general and domestic violence in particular.

Cultural Conditioning

Wife beating was not only a social norm but protected in many cultures. "Keeping her in line" was socially acceptable even if it meant doing so through violent means.

Misunderstanding of Scripture

A gross misunderstanding and misinterpretation of those passages that deal with the role of men and women in marriage and in the church have, unfortunately, led to abuse. Many men have mistakenly used the Scriptures to justify the mistreatment of their wives.

You could add many other factors such as substance abuse, emotional illness, and human weakness, but the things listed above are the ones that greatly affect the cycle of violence in homes.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

In studying relationships where violence is a regular occurrence, researchers have found a particular cycle or pattern that shows up in marriages where there is abuse. Because it is cyclical in nature, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when or where the cycle begins, but the first clue that you are in this cycle of domestic violence is:

1. A Violent Episode

This could be a shove, ugly words, throwing something, or worse.

2. Crisis State

The batterer feels remorse and asks to be pardoned. The victim is lobbied for her forgiveness (flowers, promises to go to church, counseling). This, of course, is the best time to take a new direction and deal effectively with the problem. However, the episode is usually swept under the carpet as life moves on and the memory of the event fades.

3. Honeymoon Period

This is the high point in the cycle. There may be vacations, gifts, some new plans are drawn up in order to replace the ugly incident, he is sweet and kind. This honeymoon period moves the victim to forget, and not go through with counseling or legal action.

4. Calmness

Things go back to normal, and the incident is well buried.

5. Stress Period

New problems or stressors begin to pile up. These may include isolation, the consumption of alcohol, drugs or pornography. There may be a pregnancy, a death, a role change, a change in the family structure, a medical problem or perhaps some sexual disfunction or interruption. Once the stress factors build up again, they lead to another violent episode and, if not interrupted by legal or counseling intervention, will simply begin the cycle over again. In most cases the cycle becomes shorter and more violent if allowed to repeat itself.

POWER AND CONTROL

The question most asked is why men do this. All indications are that domestic violence is an effort to obtain and maintain power and control over the wife. Batterers have an inordinate need to establish this type of power and control, and will use violence and abuse to obtain it.

Some of their methods:

- **Threats:** Threaten the wife, the children, even threaten to kill themselves. Threats to force her not to leave, not to press charges, not to tell, etc.
- **Intimidation:** Looks, gestures, words that suggest disapproval and violence. Destroying property, displaying weapons.
- **Emotional abuse:** Putting her down, mind games, humiliation, guilt trips.
- **Isolation:** Controlling who she sees, what she does, wears, reads, etc. Using jealousy to justify actions, "I love you so much."
- **Blaming:** Not taking her fear or concern seriously, or saying that the abuse did not happen, even saying she caused or provoked it.
- **Using children:** Using the children to relay messages or threatening to take the children away.
- **Using male privilege:** Treating her like a servant, misapplying Scripture to justify abuse.
- **Using economic abuse:** Preventing her from working, preventing her from knowledge about finances or the use of family finances.
- **Using sexual aggression:** The use of sexual aggression to break her spirit and sense of worth.

In his book, *When Men Batter Women*¹, Dr. Jacobson states that there are two main types of batterers. There are the "cobras" who grow calm inside as their external features become excited. Calmness in situations like these makes aggression more effective. They usually strike quickly and violently. These type of men know they are batterers but do not care. The other type of batterer mentioned by Dr. Jacobson are the "pit bulls" who become excited inside and out. Once they get going they do not let go (i.e. stalkers, men who cannot take abandonment). This type actually sees himself as the victim.

Remember, however, that all of these things are tools used by the batterers, they are not ends in themselves. Batterers actually look for victim types in order to have their control needs met. They use these type of actions to gain and increase power and control over the wife and the children. Their end goal is total control.

WHY WOMEN STAY

This is always the first question people ask the wife, "Why not just get out? Call the cops?" Women who stay in violent relationships undergo gradual steps of reasoning to reconcile the violence they are undergoing at the hands of someone they love. The reasons she stays change as the violence in the relationship progresses.

At first she stays because she loves him. She believes that he will grow up or change, and may try to control the beatings by being more careful to please him. She believes that she can reason with him and make it work if she tries. She believes his apology and is embarrassed and afraid of what will happen if the police are involved.

As the cycle continues she loves him less. She stays, however, because she hopes he will change or get help (things will get better). In addition to this, she is under pressure from family, friends and church to stay and this is so because these people do not know the truth about what is happening. She believes that he still loves and needs her, and she is afraid to be alone, or that she will not be able to support herself. To make matters more complicated, everybody loves him, and they are seen as an ideal couple, and as a Christian woman, she does not believe in divorce.

In the end, she remains because she is afraid of his power, believes his threats to harm her children and has developed low self-esteem. She is frozen in place because she does not think she can survive alone and feels helpless, unable to make a decision, confused and guilty.

If the abuse is not stopped she either becomes suicidal, homicidal or goes into a survival mode simply to stay alive from day to day.

SUMMARY

In the next chapter I will examine some of the legal aspects of this issue and what women should do if they find themselves in this situation. We will also look at what the Bible has to say about all of this for the batterers, the victims and the marriages themselves. Before getting to that material, however, I want to make the following comments concerning what we have covered so far:

It happens in the best of families.

One of the best weapons used by batterers is silence. No one tells, and no one deals with it. Family reputation is no reason to excuse family violence.

Beating someone is wrong.

Hurting someone else, using violence or intimidation to control another is a crime and a sin. We will deal with this in the next chapter but we need to remember that Paul warns those who have, "jealousy and outbursts of anger" that those guilty of these things will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:20-21).

There is help and a way out.

In Oklahoma (as well as all states in this country), there are many resources, counseling centers and laws that protect women who are caught in the cycle of domestic violence. The key is to begin making a plan, and we will discuss various parts of that plan in the next chapter.

¹ Jacobson, N. *When Men Batter Women*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. (1998)

6.

Domestic Violence: The Secret Sin

PART 2

In the previous chapter, we looked at some of the causes of domestic violence as well as a profile of the abuser and victim. We will now examine what the law and the Bible say about domestic violence.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS ABOUT SPOUSAL ABUSE

There are several laws on the books in my home state of Oklahoma that deal specifically with battery, domestic violence, and spousal abuse. For example, Probable Cause Arrest O.S. Title 22; Section 40.6; effective 11/1/86 states that, "A peace officer may arrest without a warrant a person anywhere, including his place of residence, if the peace officer has probable cause to believe the person has within the preceding four hours committed an act of domestic abuse, although the assault did not take place in the presence of the peace officer."

There are dozens of laws on the books that deal with everything from spousal abuse to protective orders and violation of these, to medical treatments and access to counseling for people in these situations. The courts will usually enforce these if there is a complaint filed but this is where the problem lies, the victim is usually talked or threatened out of doing so for various reasons. The only sure thing about batterers is that

they will repeat their actions unless there is an intervention. Secrecy is their greatest defense.

Many times a first offense is reported, recorded and dealt with through counseling and probation. When abuse is exposed and dealt with right away it lessens the chance of the cycle repeating itself. If left alone too long, however, complications arise and the success rate for counseling goes down because the cycle becomes too deeply ingrained. The key to breaking the cycle is to report the violence as soon as it starts and get it on record.

WHAT THE COUNSELORS RECOMMEND

If a person has been trapped in a cycle of domestic abuse for any length of time, counselors and women's shelter workers say that the key issue is safety. In my experience, I have noted that when the abuse is on-going and the woman fights back, the violence is likely to worsen. Also, if an abused woman leaves without a plan or protection she is likely to be drawn back into the cycle or hurt in other ways.

Counselors recommend that if you are dealing with someone who is in this type of situation you should:

1. Listen carefully without judging, blaming or taking sides. If the person is reassured that you are listening objectively, she may trust your advice later on.
2. Try to explain that her situation is not unique but fits the pattern of the domestic violence cycle. She needs to know that others go through this and it is not normal or acceptable.
3. Help her make a plan that will guarantee the safety of her children and herself. Leaving an abusive partner is very difficult for all the reasons mentioned before, especially if the departure is not carefully planned.
4. The best place for her to go is not a shelter, but a home. Families, churches as well as counseling professionals need to be involved in order to break the cycle and help re-establish a safe environment.

We need to understand that being abused by anyone, especially our marriage partner, is against God's law as well as man's law. When a woman is in constant danger of being hurt by her husband she should seek safety for herself and her children. This is her number one priority.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ABUSE

An additional burden carried by Christian women who are caught in the domestic violence cycle is what to do concerning their marriage. Women of faith are faced with a dilemma when an otherwise faithful husband begins to abuse her and/or the children. On the one hand, she needs to find safety to preserve herself and her children but, on the other hand, does not want to violate her conscience with an improper divorce, even if it frees her from the threat of more violence or abuse. This is a very difficult decision and every case is unique, but there are some general principles from the Bible that can guide us.

1. Do not be unequally yoked in the first place.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

- II Corinthians 6:14

Paul speaks here of Christians not uniting themselves with pagans so as to not pollute their worship with pagan ideas and practices. This imagery of being unequally yoked can also be applied to marriage as well. When I carefully examine the marriages where there is abuse I rarely, if ever, find a situation where a woman married a good and faithful Christian man and he turned out to be an abuser. You usually see the signs of trouble long before marriage. For example:

- He is not a Christian or he is a marginal one.
- He begins to verbally or emotionally abuse her before they marry.
- The woman herself was not a Christian or weak in her faith at the time.

- The couple engaged in sex before marriage, blinding out any chance for an objective evaluation of one another before marrying.

A dependable rule of thumb is that if a man truly loves the Lord it will be obvious, and if he does, he will also know how to love you. When you marry a person who is not a Christian, you marry an unregenerated sinner and there is no telling what he will become without Christ.

2. Loving yourself is the second greatest command.

³⁷ And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

³⁸ This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

- Matthew 22:37-39

The greatest command is to love God with all your being. We understand and practice this by believing and obeying Jesus Christ. The second greatest command is to love ourselves, not love our neighbors. We are to show love to our neighbors in the way we love ourselves, not vice versa. First, we learn to love ourselves and then we can extend that love to our neighbors, it does not work the other way around.

One of the most asked questions by people observing an abusive situation taking place in someone else's family is, "Why do women in these relationships allow themselves to be battered in the first place?" There are several possible answers:

- They saw this in their own families and are, in some strange way, familiar with this kind of man and situation.
- Ignorance/weakness, they do not know any better or are too weak emotionally, financially or socially to break out.
- They like the excitement created by the highs and lows of the cycle (i.e. they enjoy the "honeymoon" period between violent events and believe they can maintain the peace). It is like a drug, they are addicted to the action.

- The one most common denominator, however, is that these women do not like themselves much. There could be many reasons for this (abused as children in some way, divorce or problems in parents' marriage for which they take blame, too much negative feedback or too little approval as children).

For whatever reasons, these women have esteem problems and the first step to help them get out of this cycle of violence is to convince them that they are worthy of being loved and cared for properly. In other words, if they love God and want to obey and please Him, they need to obey His command to love yourself.

In practical terms this means:

You do not have to live like this.

Loving yourself means avoiding situations where you can be abused or injured for no reason. The Apostle Paul was ready to die for the gospel if he had no choice, but given the opportunity he loved himself enough to escape those who wanted to kill him.

You do not deserve this.

God is our judge, He will punish. The state has a right to punish criminals. No one else has this right, and that includes spouses. Loving ourselves means that we will not allow anyone to abuse us for whatever reason. Abused women need to know that protecting themselves from harm is part of doing God's will. Because He loves us, we should love ourselves also.

3. Abusive partners are sinners.

²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church
- Ephesians 5:28-29

The Bible does not say it in a negative way, "Thou shalt not abuse your wife." Instead, Paul gives the positive command to husbands as to the treatment of their wives: Love them as your own bodies, anything you do for yourself do for her, anything you would not do to yourself, do not do to her. Your goal is to love her as Christ loved the church. This includes supporting, protecting, nurturing and even sacrificing your life for her if need be. Obviously, there is no room for abuse, manipulation, violence, or obsessive control.

Peter says that a husband who does not honor, understand, and care for his wife will not be heard by God in prayer (I Peter 3:7). In the end, God will judge everyone, and husbands who have been guilty of outbursts of anger, violence or abuse will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19).

4. The bottom line in marriage is peace.

¹² But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵ Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?
- I Corinthians 7:12-16

The best-case scenario is that two Christians, who are virgins, marry and establish a Christian home for life, and then die and go to heaven. In the first century church at Corinth not many could claim this ideal, so Paul gives instructions to guide the various marital combinations:

²⁵ Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is

trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.
- I Corinthians 7:25-28

To singles, he says it is better to remain that way, but if they marry, they do not sin.

¹⁰ But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹ (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.
- I Corinthians 7:10-11

To Christian couples, he says that if they are having problems, they can separate for a time in order to work things out but must not divorce.

⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹ But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.
- I Corinthians 7:8-9

To widows and divorcees, he says that they are better off remaining unmarried but, if they cannot control their sexual desires, they are better off getting married again than sinning through fornication.

Finally, to those married to non-Christians (and for the purpose of this section I include abusive husbands in this category because most times batterers are non-Christians or Christians who have fallen away) Paul gives this advice: If you can live in peace, do so, do not leave because you are legitimately married and you are the only chance your spouse has of hearing the gospel. Living in peace, in a domestic violence situation, means that the abuser is seeking the help he needs in order to get the situation under control so there can be peace in the marriage.

Paul then says, if he leaves, let him go. When Paul says, "let him go, you are not under bondage," he includes the idea of peace. In other words, if they refuse to live in peace, you are not under bondage to remain. In verse 16 he admonishes the Christian partner not to be so sure that forcing the unbeliever to stay (or continuing to live under siege with an abuser) will somehow force him to be saved. You do not know that this will happen and should not base your decision on this hope.

I believe that Paul is saying that if the unbeliever is willing to live in peace despite your differences, you should stay because under these circumstances you might have a chance to save his soul. On the other hand, if he refuses to live with you because of your faith, or refuses to live in peace with you (in domestic violence situations this would mean he refuses to get help for this problem) then you are not bound to him anymore. Let him go (or in the case of abuse, save yourself), because hanging on in this kind of situation will not guarantee the salvation of his soul. If he rejects you or beats you, he rejects the Spirit that is within you.

The big question, of course, is whether Paul is referring to divorce here or not. I believe that he is referring to divorce for one reason in particular. Throughout the passage he has been talking about marriage and divorce, when you can and when you cannot. In this passage he simply says that you can (you are not bound). The confusion has come about because he does not use the word divorce, but rather a euphemism that means the same thing, "not bound."

Of course, every situation is different and we must carefully examine our conscience and God's word before making decisions. With patience, forgiveness, effort, prayer and repentance some marriages can be saved and rebuilt. Paul says that when everything fails, the believer does not have to be bound to one who rejects them by abandoning them or, I would add, abusing them which is the same thing except the punishment and cruelty is physical as well as emotional. God has called us to peace, not to abandonment, abuse or terror by our spouses.

7.

Mixed Religious Marriages

In a perfect world men and women would all be Christian, they would all be virgins and they would marry and be faithful all of their lives. And we would not be needing this book on dealing with divorce.

In our present world, however, Christians marry non-Christians, or non-Christians marry each other and then one of them becomes a Christian, or one partner in a Christian couple abandons the faith leaving the other one to carry on alone, or two people who profess faith in Christ but were raised with different church backgrounds marry one another. In all of these examples there exists a mixed religious marriage and along with it certain problems unique to this situation.

The primary goal in a religiously mixed union is to create a good marriage, not convert the spouse. Christians, for example, cannot hope to convert their partners unless they are able to establish a happy and satisfying marriage relationship first.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible recognizes and accepts that such marriages exist.

¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what

fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people."
- II Corinthians 6:14-16

This was a warning to Christians not to be yoked (in a relationship with) the pagans of that time. Christians had no business dealing with any of the disgusting pagan practices going on in that society (sex orgies, idol worship, etc.). This could include marriage to one who was involved in a pagan lifestyle. Paul's urging here was that the Corinthians were to avoid the activities of paganism.

Some, however, have used this passage to teach that today, a member of the Church of Christ, for example, cannot marry a member of the Nazarene Church or any other denomination for that matter. This would be stretching the point that Paul is making. It is true that mixed religious marriages are different, and the general principle that we should not yoke ourselves unequally is wise advice in general (the same is true for temperament, education, finance, race, etc.). But II Corinthians deals with a believer and pagan things or people, not two believers with different backgrounds or even a believer with an atheist (an atheist is not a pagan).

In the first century, religiously mixed marriages of the extreme kind (pagan and Christian) were present in the assembly and Paul addresses the church's concern about these type of arrangements.

DO NOT DIVORCE

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her.
- I Corinthians 7:12

Being married to a non-believer is not an excuse to divorce that person. Just because a partner becomes unfaithful to Christ, is not grounds for leaving them.

And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away.

- I Corinthians 7:13

Note the common thread here is that the unbeliever wants to live in peace. The acid test for staying together is not the conversion of the unbeliever, it is their unwillingness to live with the believer in peace despite the differences in faith. Of course, Paul assumes that the believer will not abandon the relationship, so he places the decision to leave at the feet of the non-believer.

For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

- I Corinthians 7:14

Some think that God does not recognize marriages where one partner is an unbeliever. If this were true, every non-Christian couple would be living in adultery. Paul teaches that God recognizes the marriage and blesses it because of the believer; blesses it in the sense that through the believing partner the unbeliever and the children have access to the gospel, access to prayer, access to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and in this way are sanctified (he does not mean they are automatically saved).

Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

- I Corinthians 7:15

The believer is bound to the marriage and it is not discussed whether they would leave or not. However, if the unbeliever leaves, two things happen: the believer needs to let them go (not push them), but allow them to leave, and the believer is no longer bound to the marriage. Some say that this means that the believer is no longer bound to obey the husband but is still married. However, Paul is not talking about duty to the partner, he is talking about marriage and divorce. He says, if the unbeliever leaves you let him go, you are no longer bound in that

marriage. Not to do so may cause trouble. If you are not bound in marriage, you are therefore free to re-marry. I will go more deeply into this in future chapters.

For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?
- I Corinthians 7:16

It is the hope that the unbeliever will convert but there are no guarantees. So long as they are with you there is hope but when they let go, you need to let go also. Keeping them against their will or causing trouble will not save them. If they go let them, you are not guilty of divorce or guilty of losing their soul. Your main responsibility is to do your best for the marriage and give a good witness, their soul is their responsibility.

There are other passages that deal with divorce and remarriage, and we will discuss these in other chapters, but these two passages give us some guidance in the area of religiously mixed marriages.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In I and II Corinthians, Paul deals with the problems of mixed marriages and lays out general principles: avoid unequal relationships, but if you are in one try living in peace. If, on the other hand, your partner leaves, let them. Of course, if the unbeliever stays then what do you do? How do you manage to live in peace in a religiously mixed marriage as Paul commands?

1. Realize that God has Not Abandoned You

Some feel guilty because they marry someone who is not a Christian or someone who has been raised in another religious environment. Others feel separated from church friends because of their situation with a new spouse or one who has left the church. The first step is to understand that God has not forsaken or abandoned you, you are not alone.

³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Romans 8:37-39

If these things cannot separate you, a mixed religious marriage will not either. God is the God of the perfect as well as the imperfect, and He will support and love you as you work on a relationship with an unbelieving spouse.

2. Communicate Positively About Religion

Since religious differences can be an acute sore spot in a relationship, both partners have to learn to communicate positively about the subject when it is discussed. This means:

- It is ok not to agree on fundamentals but be willing to express your point to view.
- Avoid the temptation to label the other person in negative terms because they are different religiously (dumb, emotional, fanatic).
- Make sure that you do not use religion as the battle ground for problems that have nothing to do with religion.
- Allow the love of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, the influence of the Word and the witness of your actions be the tools by which you will convince the unbelieving spouse that believing is better than not believing. This is true communication.
- Respect the things you do not agree with in religion.
- Do not judge religious motives, do not condemn your spouse's lack of faith or wrong faith. God will do the judging in good time.

If both partners understand that religion is a delicate thing, that it needs extra effort and patience, then there will be less fighting or hurt even if there is continued disagreement.

3. Act Like a Christian

The believer is always bound to act like a believer regardless of his or her spouse. For men this means the kind of leadership Paul talks about in Ephesians 5-6:

- Love of wife, ready to sacrifice for her.
- Spiritual leadership of family.
- Tenderness with children.
- Honesty and sincerity in work.
- Good citizenship.

For women this means submission:

- Women submitting to their husbands whether they are believers or not, it is a biblical command.
- This may be difficult because the man is not under the headship of Christ, but possible.
- The rule of thumb is, submit unless doing so would lead you to a personal sin.

Acting like a Christian in this context is difficult because the unbelieving partner may not understand all of your struggles and personal issues, but the best view of Christ they will get is watching how you act, not listening to what you say.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives.

- 1 Peter 3:1

4. Identify and Keep Your Priorities

MISGUIDED PRIORITIES:	WHAT PRIORITIES SHOULD BE:
1. God	1. God
2. Church	2. Spouse
3. Children	3. Children
4. Spouse	4. Church
5. World	5. World (career/hobbies/friends)

Most problems in any marriage occur when priorities are skewed or the couple has not shared what their personal priorities are. When both partners know what the Christian partner's priorities ought to be, it will help make sense of the actions taken by the believer and reassure the non-believer that aside from God Himself, they are nevertheless a top priority for their Christian mate.

5. Understand the Unbeliever

Most effort is usually directed at getting the unbeliever to understand Christianity, certain salvation doctrines or church life. The effort needs to be the other way around. The Christian spouse needs to make an extra effort to understand what the non-believer feels. They are not like you in faith or practice. They need to be understood, not for the purpose of changing them, but in order to know, empathize and love them better. Greater understanding will minimize criticism and open up new avenues in the relationship.

Here are some common complaints or concerns of non-believing spouses:

Lack of comfort

They are not comfortable with religious services or Christian social activities (they do not want to do the wrong thing). They feel uncomfortable because they think that church members "spot" them or judge them as second-class citizens.

They feel betrayed

Some feel betrayed because their mate has a stronger attachment to the church and Christian friends than themselves. This is especially true when one spouse becomes a Christian after marriage. Habits, activities and friends change all of a sudden. This can cause a lot of stress.

Self-persecution

Non-Christian spouses still have to deal with sin, fear, guilt, shame and disappointment in themselves, but without the comfort of the cross. There is no final solution to the spiritual issues that they feel but may not be able to articulate yet. They do not accept Christ as the solution to their problems, but they still suffer the consequences.

Panic

Some feel that their partner is moving ahead of them or is committing themselves to someone or something that they are not a part of. This spouse will usually default to one of three positions: I will get some extra hobbies; I will cause trouble; I will follow my partner.

Resentment

Religion is stupid and is wasting my partner's life and my family's time and money. It causes nothing but arguments and is making me depressed.

Prejudice

My wife's church are fanatics. I married one, but I do not want to become one.

Struggle for control

It is one thing for my spouse to believe in this but what about the children? Debates over how many times a week you go to church; his church, her church; refusal to have children "indoctrinated."

All of these and other feelings are legitimate concerns for the unbeliever, and they need to be addressed whether they are converted or not. For solutions we go back to Paul's original principles:

1. Avoid unequal relationships because these are the problems you will deal with.
2. If you are in a mixed religious marriage, strive for peace and unity in the marriage first, and conversion second (you cannot have one without the other). We become frustrated and discouraged because we focus all of our energy on converting our partner, thinking this will solve the problems. If we first concentrate on maintaining marital peace, submission, good leadership, positive communication, sincere understanding of our unbelieving spouse's concerns and feelings, we will be building a good marriage and then perhaps the stage will be set for sharing our faith in a positive light. Note that Paul holds the believer responsible for building a marriage in peace, not for the faithfulness of the partner or their conversion.

BELIEVER IN A MIXED MARRIAGE'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH

The Christian in a mixed marriage feels alone, finds it hard to relate to other couples and cannot participate freely in many activities because of their situation. How can they grow as Christians, and how can they minister to others? In answer to these questions I offer the following practical advice:

1. Find your gift and use it. Don't simply focus on your problem.
2. Minister to people of like situations. Share what has worked for you and provide encouragement and Christian friendship to those who struggle with the similar issues.

3. Teach your own children to the degree that you are able. Timothy, the evangelist in the Bible, came from a religiously mixed marriage and it was his mother and grandmother that taught him the faith (II Timothy 1:5).
4. Begin a prayer ministry for the sick and those who ask for prayer in the church. This is a powerful ministry and does not require a believing spouse to be effective.
5. Do not lose hope. As long as it is up to you, continue to hope and pray for your unbelieving spouse. I have witnessed the conversion of spouses some five, ten and even twenty years after they first married their Christian partner.

...with God all things are possible.

- Matthew 19:26

Beauchamp, G. & Beauchamp, D., (1980).
The Religiously Mixed Marriage. US: Quality Publications.

8.

Divorce and the Gospel of Grace

Divorce causes many burdens: physical (moving, money, custody, etc.), emotional (anger, resentment, humiliation), and sexual (pressure of unsatisfied sexual needs). There are many ways to cope with these issues. Some find a new place to live or a new job. Others depend on family, friends and even counselors to provide emotional support in this time of crisis. Many remarry and find again the way to express their sexual needs in a renewed relationship.

There are times, however, that we continue to carry a burden, even after we have "landed on our feet" from divorce. This type of burden cannot be handled or corrected by people because it is spiritual in nature and thus can only be lifted from our hearts by God.

Divorce, especially among Christians, causes guilt, shame and fear because believers know that they have not only failed in marriage but have also failed and offended God. In this chapter, therefore, I want to discuss how God deals with the spiritual burdens caused by divorce. For the person struggling with the guilt and spiritual discouragement caused by divorce, God provides the Good News (Gospel), and the good news is that the perfection lost through a failed marriage can be renewed again through Jesus Christ. In order to explain how this is achieved, we need to first review the biblical idea of perfection.

PERFECTION THROUGH GRACE

Perfection

In the Bible, God reveals to us what He is like, what we are like and what is necessary for there to be peace between Himself and ourselves. In a word: perfection. We need to be perfect in order to please and exist with God. This was the case at the beginning of creation when everything was perfect:

- God made His creation perfect (Genesis 1:31).
- God made man perfect and had a perfect relationship with him (Genesis 1:26-27).
- Man and woman had a perfect relationship with one another in marriage (Genesis 2:24-25).

The ideal for a perfect marriage, therefore, was set forth in Genesis and consisted of one man and one woman joined together in an intimate and exclusive lifetime relationship.

Imperfection

The Bible also reveals that we are no longer perfect because we have all sinned in one way or another (Romans 1:24-32; 3:23; 6:23). There is nothing that we can do in order to change or fix this problem of sinfulness. This imperfection sometimes affects our marriages in different ways (e.g. fornication, selfishness, pride, abuse, abandonment) and, as a result, these marriages end in divorce.

HOW GOD DEALS WITH IMPERFECTION

The burden we experience after a divorce is often caused by the guilt, we feel for having failed at life's most important relationship. As children of God, we want to be perfect in all that we do, and that includes marriage. We understand that as Christians, God restores our perfection by offering a perfect life (Jesus Christ) to cover our sins (imperfections) thus making us perfect once again in His eyes despite our many failures, and that includes failure in marriage as well. For

believers, the cross of Jesus is what enables our perfection before God and is a symbol of His grace towards all who believe.

THE GOOD NEWS AND REPENTANCE

The good news of the Gospel is that wherever your imperfection lies, when you cover it with the grace of God (symbolized and made possible by the cross of Christ), you render it perfect once again before God. In practical terms we see this occur when a person acknowledges their faith in Jesus and expresses that faith in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). At this point all sins are washed away in the waters of baptism (Acts 22:16) and a new Christian emerges from the water with a clear conscience, free from the burden of sin and guilt (I Peter 3:21).

When it comes to divorce, however, there is a debate as to what a divorced person should do in order to accomplish repentance in the process of becoming a Christian, or receiving forgiveness in the case where one is already a believer and fails in marriage. Some say that repentance in these circumstances requires that the divorced person (if they have remarried) should dissolve their existing marriage and return to their original spouse, and if this is not possible then should remain celibate. Then and only then, goes the argument, can that person be baptized in the case of conversion, or restored if the person is already a Christian.

Others argue that no dissolution of marriage or forced celibacy are necessary since the person becoming a Christian or the Christian being restored are both receiving forgiveness for all of their sins (including the sin of divorce) made possible by the grace of God.

I believe that the difference between these two positions is that one demands repentance based on Law and the other, repentance based on God's grace.

Legal Repentance

Legal repentance stresses restitution and punishment (e.g. celibacy, dissolved marriages, reduced fellowship). The reasoning for this position is that if a person destroys a perfect situation (marriage) and cannot restore it, we impose some form of punishment or restitution

upon him that needs to be made in order to receive forgiveness. This type of repentance is external and based in legalism and works-oriented salvation. There is something that you must do or that is imposed on you in order to earn your forgiveness and God's acceptance.

Repentance Based on Grace

Repentance based on grace requires a change of heart, not a change of status, or bearing some kind of punishment. For example, if legal repentance were required of David in his sin with Bathsheba (II Samuel 11 - adultery, deceit, murder) they would have needed to give him the death penalty in order for David to make proper restitution for his crimes. Repentance based on grace, however, would require a new heart. Godly repentance is internal in that something comes from within the person to change the outside of that person. In Psalm 32 David describes the changes that repentance, based on grace, produced in him and his life.

¹ How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!

² How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not
impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

³ When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of
summer. Selah.

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord";
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time
when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you

should go;

I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,

Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,

Otherwise they will not come near to you.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,

But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.

¹¹ Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones;

And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

After God forgave him, David was a changed man. He was a man renewed because his repentance was inward, responding to God's grace, not the Law. Despite his despicable sins, he was perfect once again in God's eyes and the psalm he wrote as a result of that experience clearly demonstrates his confidence in this.

You can work at improving your life and weaknesses, but the only way to be perfect is to accept the grace of God offered to you through Christ and received through faith expressed in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). There is no other way to be perfect. The good news is that perfection acquired in this way equals the perfection that comes through perfect obedience of God's commands (Hebrews 10:14). This is how wonderful grace is! When we become perfect through the grace of God we are then released from the burden of guilt, shame and fear, as well as the requirement to make restitution to God.

ISSUES REGARDING THE GOSPEL AND THE SINS OF DIVORCE/ADULTERY

As I mentioned before, one issue that is hotly debated concerning divorce is the manner in which repentance is accomplished when seeking God's forgiveness for this sin. Again, the fault line for the argument here is usually confusion over what true repentance consists of. Many mistake "restitution" for repentance. Restitution is a payment made to cover an offense (e.g. a car thief makes restitution for his crime by returning the stolen merchandise and serving out the punishment for

his crime); repentance, on the other hand, is a change of heart (e.g. that car thief decides that he will never steal again and when he is released, will get a job and buy a car).

When it comes to divorce, the individuals are guilty of breaking their marriage covenant/vow made before God (breaking this vow is also referred to as unfaithfulness or adultery - Matthew 19:9). There could be many reasons for the break (sexual misconduct, neglect, abuse, addiction, boredom, etc.), but the net result is that the marriage vow has been broken and therein lies the sin ("What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." - Matthew 19:6b). There may be degrees of guilt on one side or the other, but the sin of divorce is essentially breaking the vow that God has commanded man not to break. Therefore, what began as perfect (two people pledging before God to live as husband and wife for life) has now become imperfect through divorce.

The question arises, "How does one repent of this sin of divorce?" A good way to answer this question is with the following question, "How does one repent of any sin against God?"

Answer, "A sincere change of heart leading to a change of life." I refer back to the previous example of David and Bathsheba. After David acknowledged his sin and repented, he took Bathsheba as his wife and later they had a child and named him Solomon. Solomon became king after David and reigned for 40 glorious years over Israel, all with God's blessing.

Another example of what God requires in repentance is seen in the parable of the unmerciful steward in Matthew 18. A steward is brought before his king to pay off an impossibly large debt. He pleads with the king for mercy and the monarch completely forgives him the money he owes. Later on, this same steward threatens to imprison a fellow slave who owes him a very small amount of money. His actions are reported to the king by other servants. Read below how Jesus completes the parable:

³² Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.

³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And his lord, moved

with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

With the sins of adultery and divorce, therefore, repentance requires an examination of the heart to find out what the root of the problem is in the first place, and then a change is made in that thing. Restitution, on the other hand, will demand celibacy, dissolving existing marriages, reuniting divorced couples by force, and disfellowshipping people who cannot or will not pay this price.

We need to understand that it was Jesus who made restitution for all the sins of mankind, and that includes restitution for the sin of divorce (I John 2:2; I Peter 2:24). When we demand penalties as repentance for the sin of divorce we are, in effect, adding to the gospel, and that is forbidden (Galatians 1:8-9). In this regard note that when Peter preached the gospel on Pentecost Sunday and 3000 people responded (Acts 2:37-42), none of these were asked any questions about their marital status or made to dissolve their existing marriages in order to fulfill the command to repent before being baptized. Surely among 3000 individuals there were many who were guilty of the sin of divorce (not to mention complicit in the unlawful execution of Jesus - how would one repent of this?) and yet all were baptized on that same day!

A sincere desire, therefore, to change a lustful heart, filled with pride, lack of self-control, arrogance, laziness, inflexibility, selfishness and worldliness is the type of repentance that permits a person to emerge from the waters of baptism or the prayers of the church with forgiveness and a renewed heart.

Repentance of this nature will enable a person to succeed at what they have once failed. God is more interested in a changed heart and life than in punishment. Christ died to set us free from Law and to give us a new life, not to punish us.

Some will say, "Well, if we are under grace why even bother to repent?" (Romans 6:15). Here are three reasons why we all must repent:

1. God will punish those who do not, like the unmerciful steward (Luke 13:5). He does not require restitution, the cross has done

this for us, but He does require a change. The cross can power this change within us if we let it.

2. We try to avoid sin because we do not want to become slaves of it again, and be lost as a consequence (Romans 6:16).
3. Avoiding sin glorifies God and demonstrates His power working in our lives (Romans 12:1).

Some people see grace as an excuse for sin, a reason for mediocrity in their spiritual lives, or a defense for lack of deep commitment to Jesus Christ. However, in quite the opposite way, grace is the reason for our confidence, the power of God to overcome sin in our lives, and the comfort that God gives us when we yearn to be free from this body of sin and joined to Christ.

SUMMARY

There are those who say that this teaching concerning divorce and remarriage is simply the preaching of "cheap grace." My response to this is that grace is better than cheap, it is free!

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Romans 6:23

Perhaps the real problem is that we still want to pay for our salvation somehow; the bigger the payment, the more our pride is fed. Grace is free for us, but let us never forget that it was not free for God, it cost Him the suffering and death of His beloved Son. I am grateful for this grace and hope never to violate it.

Let us summarize what we have said about God's grace and how it applies to those who have failed in marriage.

1. In order to be perfect before God through Christ, one must exhibit the true repentance of a changed heart. Repentance cannot and does not require the repair of all the damage done in the past (what you stole, past sexual sins, the harm caused by your lies, a divorce, etc.), but a changed heart will avoid these

things in the future and God's grace (the blood of Christ) will cover your past failures and provide strength and encouragement in the on-going struggle with these and other sins in the future (I John 1:7-9).

2. If you are not a Christian, you enter this perfection through grace by faith expressed in confessing your belief in Jesus, repenting of your sins, being baptized, and living faithfully.
3. If you are a Christian but have fallen (even fallen through divorce), you must acknowledge your sin, repent and accept God's forgiveness through prayer. This is the way to restore a believer to perfection in Christ (I John 1:7-9).

The mark of true Christian maturity is when we have a strong enough faith in Jesus Christ to accept that His grace is what renders us perfect, not our attempts at perfection through legalistic rule-keeping and self-punishment.

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Philippians 3:8-11

9.

The Most Asked Questions About Divorce and Remarriage

One area of serious disagreement in our brotherhood revolves around the teaching on the subject of marriage and divorce. There is conflict because there are a variety of opinions when it comes to interpreting what the Bible actually teaches about this topic. Like others before me, I offer my own thoughts as to what I sincerely believe the Bible says concerning these things. If you agree, I hope you will continue to pray and study so this issue will become clearer for you. If you disagree, you will be among many sincere people who do. Please recognize that there may be room for growth no matter which position one takes regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage.

For now, let us dig into the most asked and most difficult questions on divorce and remarriage.

MARRIAGE

A good place to start is by reviewing what most of us can agree upon and what is rather clear in the Bible concerning marriage. Beginning in Genesis and through to the New Testament the Scriptures teach that marriage consists of a union between one man and one woman for life. No separation is permitted except where there is a violation of the

marriage vow through sexual sin or in the event of the death of one of the partners. There is general agreement in the church that this is the basic teaching of the Bible about Christian marriage.

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE QUESTIONS

The disagreement occurs when we discuss the aftermath of a divorce. Can the innocent party remarry? Can the guilty party remarry? What is the proper repentance for the guilty? What do we do with people who are remarried after a divorce and want to be baptized?

One of the causes for disagreement revolves around the question, "Can a marriage be dissolved (in the eyes of God), and if it can, by what?" The passages found in Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-12; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; I Corinthians 7:1-40 deal with these questions. Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:9, however, summarize well what is mostly contained in these others, so we will concentrate on these two.

WHAT DISSOLVES A MARRIAGE?

¹ When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ² and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"

⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become

one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

⁷ They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" ⁸ He said to them,

"Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

- Matthew 19:1-9

In verse 9 of this passage Jesus is not debating whether or not it is possible to dissolve a marriage, He is showing what are the just and unjust reasons for doing so. His point is that a person who dissolves their marriage through divorce without proper cause (fornication by the partner) does so in an unjust manner and thus commits adultery. The difference of opinion comes here: some say that the breaking of the marriage vow without just cause is adultery and the actual sin committed in this case (I agree). Others say that the second marriage, or remarriage is the adultery because there is sexual activity in this new relationship, and they refer to this union as an "adulterous marriage." I disagree with this second position for several reasons.

Reason one is that the definition of adultery can include the following actions: sex outside of marriage (Proverbs 6:32), sex with a partner who is not your spouse (Leviticus 20:10), or the breaking of a vow, especially the one made to worship only God (spiritual adultery - Ezekiel 23:37). Each of these actions have been referred to in the Bible as adultery. However, a legally contracted marriage, even if it is a second or third one, is not adultery and has never been called this in the Bible.

Another reason is grammar. Those who claim that the remarriage is the act of adultery do so because of the way they understand the meaning of the words, "commits adultery," in Matthew 19:9. In the original language of the New Testament (Greek), verbs had various tenses, much like they do in English. The proper interpretation of this passage rests mainly on how one assigns the tense to the verb "commits." One of these Greek tenses, point action or punctiliar, describes an action that has been done once (i.e. I went to church Sunday). Another of the tenses used was called linear or durative, and described an on-going or repeated action (i.e. I went to church every Sunday that I was in town). In both of the examples mentioned here, the same verb "went" was used. However, in one sentence the action (went to church) occurred only one time, and in the other was done repeatedly. Even though the same verb was used (went), the context of the sentence itself revealed if the action that the verb described was done only once or continuously.

Many argue that the action "commits adultery" mentioned in Matthew 19:9 is in the linear mode (on-going), and because of this conclude that the adultery is a continuous action. This would mean that the actual sin of adultery is in the remarriage and that every time sex occurs in this

union, there is adultery because the verb suggests an on-going action. This same group contends that divorce, for reasons other than fornication, does not dissolve a marriage. This interpretation has created the following positions concerning the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage among these brethren.

1. They maintain that the adultery is committed in the remarrying. Since their understanding is that divorce itself cannot dissolve a marriage, and they contend that the adultery is an on-going action, their conclusion is that people who remarry after a divorce are in what is described as an "adulterous marriage" situation (i.e. divorcees are committing adultery every time they have sex because they are still married to their original partners in the eyes of God).
2. They also hold the idea that in order to become Christians or for Christians in such situations to repent, they must dissolve existing marriages and return to their original spouses, or if this is not possible, remain celibate for life.

There are others¹ who argue that the verb in the passage that we are discussing is in the punctiliar mode which means it is a one-time action (I agree with this interpretation). The point that they make is that if what the verb is describing is a singular action, then the verb must match. This is how the action is determined and how the rules of grammar decide the mode. In the verse that we are examining, the conditional verbs are clearly punctiliar: "anyone who divorces" is a one-time action (you do not divorce a person continuously, you only do it once), "and marries another" is also a one-time action (you do not repeatedly marry someone, even if it is a second or third marriage, the marriage only happens once). According to the rules of grammar, if both of the actions in this sentence are one-time events, then the concluding verb also needs to be interpreted in the one-time mode as well (commits adultery - one time). If this is so, and adultery is a one time thing that happens when a person dissolves a marriage without just cause, then other conclusions can be drawn:

1. Divorce, for any reason, dissolves a marriage. Doing this is not righteous or pleasing to God, but it is the end of that marriage. Jesus did not say that it was impossible to dissolve a marriage,

He said that men should not destroy what God created, but they could if they chose to. In Romans 7:1-10, Paul explains that only death dissolves a marriage in a righteous way (where no sin is committed by either party). Divorce also dissolves a marriage but does it in an unrighteous way (where one or both partners can be guilty of the sin of adultery).

2. The breaking of the vow is called adultery. The adultery is not in remarriage, it is in the dissolving of the marriage without just cause (a violation of the vow). There can be other sins like abuse, neglect, dishonesty, abandonment that lead or cause the divorce, but the sin charged to the person who dissolves the marriage is called adultery.
3. Divorce without just cause is the sin (and will be punished if not repented of and forgiven), remarriage is not the sin. The grammar demonstrates that it is a one-time event. The sin occurs when one divorces, not when either party remarries. The context also makes the same point. Jesus says that the person remarries, He does not say that the person goes into fornication or harlotry. The person who has sinned (the sin of adultery) has remarried and that marriage is legitimate before God and man.

GUILTY / INNOCENT

The final and most important outcome is how we deal with both guilty and innocent parties in a failed marriage.

The Guilty Party

The guilty party is the one who dissolves the marriage for no just reason. This person is guilty of adultery. For those who mistakenly believe that the remarriage is the adultery, I offer the following hypothetical situation to make my point:

Imagine a married couple who live in New York City and the man is offered a great job with many advantages but must move to London, England, to secure his new position. He discusses this with his wife and she refuses to move, wanting to stay close to her job and family. The man eventually concludes that he has a better future in London, and

decides to divorce his wife and take the new job. Now, let us say that this man is consumed with his career and never remarries, being quite satisfied with his new life and work. What sin, therefore, is he guilty of before God? Those who maintain that the adultery is committed in the remarriage would have no charge against this man until he remarries. As far as they are concerned, so long as he does not remarry, he has not sinned. The fact that there is no sexual sin in this story helps us to see that the real offense here was that the man broke his vow of marriage in order to take a better job. His actions may have been caused by selfishness, greed or a simple lack of love for his wife, but the sin he is guilty of is adultery, dissolving his marriage without just cause, exactly the type of offense Jesus was getting at in Matthew 19:9.

According to the Bible, to remove this sin the man must acknowledge his guilt and repent (I John 1:7-9) and be baptized if he is not a Christian (Acts 2:38). With forgiveness comes restoration with God but not necessarily with the victim against whom the sin was committed. Some believe that for true repentance to happen, the guilty person needs to dissolve his existing marriage and return to his first spouse or remain celibate if that is not possible. I do not agree with this requirement for repentance in the case of divorce because I believe it is not biblically based. Here are several reasons why:

1. Grammatically the passage does not support the idea that remarriage is adultery. As I have stated, the adultery is the divorcing without just cause. This is the sin one needs forgiveness for (it is damnable if not forgiven), but remarriage is not the sin and needs no forgiveness.
2. What makes restitution to God for the destruction of the marriage (or any other sin for that matter) is the cross of Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:24). Jesus pays the moral debt for our sins owed to God through His death on the cross. This restitution is made for all sins, including the sin of adultery that we are discussing here. God does not require that we make restitution for any of our sins, Jesus has done this on our behalf and in this we see the grace of God at work for sinful mankind.
3. There is no teaching or example in the New Testament of a requirement to dissolve second marriages and a return to

original partners in order to meet the requirements of repentance. In Acts 2:38-42, we read that 3000 people were baptized on the day of Pentecost in response to Peter's preaching. It is a fair assumption that in such a large number of people there were surely many who were divorced and remarried, however, there is no indication that any of them were forced to change their marital status in order to meet the demands of repentance before being baptized on that day.

4. Aside from the Scriptures themselves, there are no historical records from early church writers which show that this was ever a requirement practiced by any church at that time.

Guilty people need to repent and ask for forgiveness, and then go on with their lives. The fact that God's grace is so great does not provoke these people to more divorce. On the contrary, it motivates them to greater fidelity and love for God as well as their current partners in marriage. God's grace in forgiving one who has stolen, for example, does not provoke him to more theft!

The Innocent Party

³¹ "It was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce'; ³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

- Matthew 5:31-32

The debate over this issue also includes the predicament of the innocent party or victim in a divorce. Matthew 5:32 contains the same basic scene and information as Matthew 19:1-9, but focuses on the victim and not the instigator of the divorce. Here, the argument is not about linear or point action but whether the verb is in the active or passive form (voice). The same group that does not accept that divorce for any reason dissolves a marriage and holds to the idea that "commits adultery" is in the linear mode thus making remarriage the sin and not the unjustified divorce, also interprets the verb "commit adultery" in Matthew 5:32 in

the active voice form rather than the passive voice form. This produces the following variety of positions:

1. The innocent party in a divorce is considered an adulterer because they have been divorced (even if they have done nothing wrong).
2. The innocent party commits adultery if they remarry because they are still bound to the first marriage before God since a divorce, for any reason other than fornication (sexual sin), does not actually dissolve a marriage.
3. Anyone who marries them in any circumstance is also guilty of adultery.

There are other scholars² who teach that the voice form of this verb, "commit adultery," is in the passive sense and the burden of the passage is directed towards the guilty party in order to reveal the extent of the damage being done to the innocent party by divorcing without just cause. In other words, if you translate the verb in the "active" voice, you put the burden of guilt on the innocent party. If, however, you translate it in the "passive" voice, you then put the burden of responsibility for the sin on the guilty party where it belongs.

When the verb is in the passive mode the sense is that, "everyone who divorces his wife except for the cause of unchastity, adulterates her." The idea is that the victim is scandalized and stigmatized by being put away unjustly. In the Jewish society of the first century, the only reason for putting away justly was fornication. One who was put away was assumed to have been unfaithful (whether true or not). Note that only men could instigate a legal divorce in that society. To divorce unjustly, therefore, was to taint your partner with the stigma of sexual immorality, and in the same way, anyone who married her would also be tainted.

Jesus is exposing the triple damage done by the perpetrator of an unjust divorce: he commits adultery, destroys the marriage and stigmatizes the innocent party as well as anyone who would marry them in the future. I believe that this is an accurate interpretation for several reasons:

1. It agrees with the general principle of grace seen in the gospel. Jesus does not victimize the victims. If the guilty can be forgiven and restored, surely the innocent can have a chance to start over as well.
2. It agrees with Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 7:15; 28 where he says that those released from spouses (either by desertion or death) were free to remarry.

The gospel of grace offers forgiveness to the guilty, and with forgiveness comes the opportunity to begin again. Grace also protects the victim and puts the responsibility for the shame brought about by divorce at the feet of the guilty, permitting the innocent to love themselves and get on with their lives as well.

¹ Dr. Jack McKinney, Harding University; Dr. C. Osborne, Pepperdine University; A.T. Robertson, Greek Commentary; Dr. R. Kelcy (D) Professor of Greek, Oklahoma Christian University.

² John Edwards, H.R. Lenski

10.

Succeeding at Remarriage

This chapter is devoted to the concerns that people who are in subsequent marriages, or those who are about to remarry, have. After all, people who remarry want to succeed in their marriages. After nearly four decades of ministry, I have found that people who have suffered through a divorce never want to go through it again.

So far in this section of the book I have written at length about marriage and divorce, and what I believe the Bible teaches on this subject:

1. That marriage is between a man and a woman for life.
2. That divorce is a sin and if unrepented of will damn the soul to hell just like any other sin.
3. That failure at marriage can be repented of and forgiven with the people involved renewed through the grace of God. (A good example of this is seen in the attitude of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. This man not only forgave his wayward child but also accepted him back as a full member of the family with all of his rights and privileges returned to him: the ring, robe, sandals and celebration were symbols of this renewal.) With forgiveness, therefore, comes renewal.

I do not believe that dissolving legally contracted marriages, whether they are the second or the tenth, is the way to achieve proper repentance. As I have mentioned previously, repentance requires an acknowledgement of the sin (breaking the vow of marriage) and a change of heart concerning the things that led to this sin (selfishness, dishonesty, impurity, etc.). When reconciliation is possible, I always encourage this, but when other marriages have been contracted after a divorce, I believe the best course of action is to follow Paul's teaching in such matters, "Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called." (I Corinthians 7:20).

Remarriage does not remove God from our lives. Marriage, by its very nature, is a call to God to help us live in the way that He has designed us to live: one man and one woman in an intimate, exclusive relationship for life. It is not natural to be alone, whether we are alone because we are single, widowed or divorced (Genesis 2:18). Those who have gone through a divorce and are remarrying know that they have previously failed and want badly to succeed at this most difficult relationship. To these I give the following advice.

SUCCEEDING AT REMARRIAGE - ADVICE

1. Realize That You Are Really Married

Some think that subsequent marriages are not the real thing. For some reason or other they incorrectly believe that their unions are not godly marriages or not as good as their first ones because God is displeased with them and will not help. Even worse, they are under the impression that their marriage is some form of adultery. These thoughts are based on the false notion that marriage cannot be dissolved, and before God you are always married to your first spouse as long as they are alive.

In the previous chapter I explained that death dissolves a marriage in a righteous way (Romans 7), and divorce dissolves a marriage in an unrighteous way. Either way, the marriage is dissolved. The Bible never calls subsequent marriages adultery. The indissolubility of marriage is a Roman Catholic idea that began at the Council of Trent in 1545 AD. The doctrine put forth was that only God could marry or unmarry a couple. The goal of this Catholic dogma was to provide the Roman Church with

authority in marital affairs, an authority not given to it by God or the Apostles.

The Bible, however, has the last word on marriage, not clergymen or churches. II Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training..." This "teaching" includes instruction concerning marriage. Ministers, elders and teachers have no authority in marital affairs other than teaching what the Bible says about marriage and helping those who are married remain faithful to God and each other.

Subsequent (second or more) marriages are not first marriages, but they are marriages in God's eyes as well as in society's eyes. God will help you with them if you ask. Society (includes family) must respect what God respects and honors. Jesus tells us to forgive seventy times seven, surely God can forgive one failed marriage and help a person get it right (if they are willing) the second or third time.

When you are legally married you are bound both by God and society to be faithful to your spouse until death because you are really married to this and only this one person, whether you are in a first or second marriage.

2. Your Marriage is Perfect Through the Cross

If you were a remarried unbeliever, you would be legally married to the second person, but your soul would be charged with the sin of adultery because of your divorce (when a person divorces without just cause, the sin committed is called adultery). Even if you legally divorced and remarried ten times, each time the sin of adultery would be charged to your soul. At death the world would bury a much-married person but hold nothing against you because all was done legally (this was the defense used by the Pharisees to excuse their own improper divorces). However, God would condemn you to hell because you divorced without just cause and committed adultery as a result, not because you remarried. The person who becomes a Christian, even though he may be divorced and remarried, is forgiven for his adultery and thus made perfect in God's sight.

The Christian who divorces and repents is also forgiven for his sin of adultery. Many find this hard to accept, but God's grace does not make a distinction about which sins to forgive or not. Repentance requires a change of heart and a change of attitude, but what makes the person perfect in God's sight is neither how he was able to fix his former marriage, nor how well he succeeds in his subsequent marriage (repentance requires that he try however). Perfection is a free gift given to a person who believes in Jesus and expresses that belief in repentance, baptism and continued faithful living. Regardless of your marital status, God makes you perfect through the cross of Christ, not through relative success in marital relationships.

3. Follow the Bible's Advice for the Remarried

I know that there is no chapter in the Bible addressed specifically to people who are remarried. But there is a lot of advice for people who have failed, and is that not what divorce and remarriage are all about? Weak and sinful people who have failed at a complex and demanding relationship are trying once again to succeed. Why is it that we are so gracious to those who have failed at telling the truth, failed at believing in Jesus, failed at not killing other people, but deny this grace for those who have failed at marriage? God is kind and patient towards all those who fail and are willing, with His help, to try again. To these, He provides the following help and advice in His word:

FORGET THE PAST

The past is where the failure and pain are and needs to be let go. When people are forgiven by God, they can forgive themselves and turn away from the past. Dwelling on what happened, what might have been done differently or why it all happened will not change the past. It will only keep the past alive in the present. This goes for the guilty as well as the victims in a failed marriage. Trying to fix the past by punishing ourselves, punishing our ex-partner or bargaining with God only manages to delay the healing. Some people do not want to heal because constant pain is their way of trying to atone for their past failure in marriage.

Paul, in speaking of his former life and the terrible failure in it says, "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I

press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul had been forgiven, and the way that he forgave himself was that he refused to dwell on the failure he had been absolved of, and concentrated on the future that God had freely offered him.

Forgetting the past is not only healthy, it is the ongoing way that we express our faith to God. Forgetting the past says, "I believe you have forgiven me and I focus on you, Lord, and not my failure."

LEARN FROM THE PAST

The past is there, the failure (whether the fault is ours or someone else's, or a mixture of both) is there as well. The failure is history and there are many reminders of it. The key is to not dwell and mourn over it, but to use the past by learning how it can help us today. Repentance is a change of heart and the past helps us to understand what we need to do in order to repent. The past shows us what we contributed to our failed relationship and thus what needs to be changed, improved, eliminated or controlled.

Many second marriages fail because the people (guilty or innocent) enter into them with the same attitude that they had in their first marriage. Many fail because issues remain unresolved and they end up blaming second spouses for the things the original spouses did. This is why second marriages often fail at a higher rate than first ones do.

My advice to divorced people is to get counseling so that they can learn from the past (who they are, why they failed, etc.) before entering into another serious relationship. Getting married again does not solve problems from the first marriage, these need to be solved before getting married again because subsequent marriages bring a whole new set of problems. If a person has learned something from the past, they will be better equipped to deal with the future.

LET YOUR LIFE AND CHANGE BE A WITNESS FOR CHRIST

Paul the Apostle often began his sermons with the story of his conversion: how a person who despised Christians grew to love the church so much that he was ready to die for it. If you base your marriage

on biblical principles, if you live your life as a faithful and fruitful Christian, if people see that it is possible to take a failed life and marriage, and through Jesus Christ build a new life as well as a new and wonderful marriage, God will be glorified. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). A loving relationship and a Christian home, these are good works even if they are produced by a subsequent marriage. They will honor God and provide a witness for the power of Christ in your life.

SUMMARY

Jesus came to save, to build, to encourage and to equip, not to judge, punish and criticize. If you have failed at marriage for whatever reason, regardless of the times:

- Ask Jesus to forgive you.
- Forget and learn from the mistakes of the past.
- Let the Spirit (through God's word) teach you how to succeed.
- Offer your new success to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise.

God is interested in our renewal, and this is true in the renewal of marriage as well as every other area in our lives.

11.

Divorce Busters

Part 1

PREVENTING A DIVORCE

We are familiar with the high number of divorces that take place here in America (Approx. 50%). Of course, these are only percentages and figures, but the numbers became more meaningful for me when my wife told me about the kids at her school. Lise used to work as an elementary school secretary and part of her job was to monitor the pick-up of children by their parents when they were sick or had other appointments. She explained that each child had a file and in that file were the special instructions as to who was or was not permitted to take the child home from school. These included ex-husbands or wives, abusive boyfriends, angry grandparents and adoptive parents who, after adopting children, had since divorced. The list, she said, went on and on. Many times these warring couples would bring their battles right into the school as they struggled to maintain custody of their child. I wish I could say these were isolated cases, but unfortunately children who had their biological parents happily working together to raise them were the exception, not the rule.

There has always been marital strife and divorce, this is nothing new. The major difference today is that many couples do not make the effort to work things out for the sake of their children (which requires self-denial) like troubled couples used to do. The present generation has simply added children to the list of casualties stemming from divorce.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer some advice on how to avoid divorce altogether, advice that comes from God's word as well as from the experience of those who have had successful marriages. In this chapter my comments will be directed towards those who are not married so they can avoid the pitfalls that lead to divorce when they eventually marry. In the next chapter I will direct my comments to those who are already married and how they can divorce-proof their relationship.

Next to becoming a Christian, getting married will be or is already the most significant action you will take that impacts your life. Next to getting married, getting divorced is the most significant negative thing you will do (aside from being convicted and imprisoned for committing a crime) that impacts your life. Marriage is important, and divorce is a very real threat, even for Christian couples and so they need to protect themselves against it.

In my counseling work I often visit with couples who are planning to marry. Many times after visiting with them and hearing their stories my advice is, "Don't do it!" Some people should not marry each other, some people should just wait, and most people should look carefully and deal with the signs that spell trouble before they marry. Based on this experience and that of other counselors (Dick Marcrear: Central Dallas Marriage Workshop), here are seven suggestions for helping you avoid a divorce even before you say, "I do."

SUGGESTION #1

**IF YOU DESIRE A CHRISTIAN HOME AND FAMILY,
DO NOT EVEN CONSIDER MARRYING SOMEONE
WHO IS NOT A STRONG CHRISTIAN.**

The purpose of dating is to find someone to love and who can return that love. Any number of people can fit that description. You can become involved with almost anyone if that is your only criterion.

The purpose of marriage, for a Christian, is to establish a Christian home and family who will together serve the Lord through His church. In II Corinthians, Paul says that we should not be bound together with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14). His point is that in trying to worship

God properly we should not be bound with pagans and their practices because this would not be pleasing to the Lord. In the same way, if we are trying to establish Christian homes where Christ is honored, where children are raised in the knowledge of God, and where the home can be used as a ministry for offering Christian hospitality and service, the only way to accomplish these things is with both partners acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

You can have a successful marriage by marrying a non-Christian, but you will not have a Christian home, and the odds that your children will be strong Christians will be greatly diminished. As far as divorce is concerned, when religion is a strong factor with only one of the partners, the chance of eventual divorce is higher. If you marry a non-Christian, realize what you are giving up (Christian home, united family) and what you are putting at risk (your marriage relationship and your faith will always be at odds).

SUGGESTION #2

RECONSIDER IF YOUR PARENTS SERIOUSLY OBJECT.

Of course, there are many exceptions to this particular suggestion. For example, you may be on bad terms with your parents, they may have failed at marriage themselves, or they may have been abusive in some way. There are many reasons that might render their opinion invalid. However, if your parents have been the normal type who have tried to love and support you despite their own weaknesses and struggles, you should pay careful attention to their advice.

Parents may not always know the person you bring home as well as you do, but they know you and more importantly, want what is best for you (and children do not always know what is best for them, even when they are grown adults). If your parents have serious doubts and can explain them, you should take the time to listen carefully and make the effort to convince them of his/her character.

Marriage not only brings two people together, it also joins two families. It is best to try to win over the family and make peace early in the relationship so that you can live in peace after you marry. There are enough pressures on young marrieds without having to deal with negative in-laws.

SUGGESTION #3

WATCH HOW YOUR POTENTIAL MATE'S PARENTS TREAT EACH OTHER.

Until we learn differently, the model for the type of husband or wife we will be is our own parents. It is not impossible to change if we want to, but until that happens we will respond to our partner and various marital situations in much the same way our parents did. The sad exception, however, is that people are usually worse than their parents, not better, unless they learn how to change. For example, Isaac used Rebekah in the same way that his father, Abraham, did with Sarah (both men lied about their true relation with their wives in order to protect themselves - Genesis 20:2; 26:7).

Your potential mate may not act like his parents while you are dating, but chances are he will once you are married. This is why it is important to get to know and observe the behavior of your partner's parents so you can discuss this with them and make the changes needed before you commit and before there is little desire to change, and divorce becomes the solution.

SUGGESTION #4

DO NOT MARRY SOMEONE WHO ABUSES DRUGS.

I include alcohol and all recreational drugs in this category. Alcohol and drug abuse are responsible for half of the divorces today. People who drink (even social drinkers) or do dope once in a while before they marry usually continue to do so after they marry. Marriage does not cure drug and alcohol dependency.

The Bible says that drunkards will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:21) and neither will those who abuse any other form of drugs. If you want your life to center on helping another person withdraw from drug abuse as a lifetime chore, marry a drinker. Your divorce is in the bag. Even if you love this person, is this the life you really want for yourself and your children?

SUGGESTION #5

FIND OUT IF YOUR POTENTIAL MATE CAN MANAGE MONEY.

When you are dating, most of the spending is on gifts and outings, and we mistakenly judge our partner's money sense by observing how much they spend on us. Marriage, however, requires skill in saving and managing money. How good is he/she at this?

Marriage counselors tell us that in the first six months of marriage, the number one cause of arguments is money. Your potential partner's attitude about money (who controls it, how it should be spent, how important it is, how it is shared) will determine not only your lifestyle but also the number of conflicts you will have. Everything costs something and how you manage the money to buy what you will need will be the subject of many discussions. Make sure that your partner not only knows how to make and spend money, but also knows how to manage and share money as well. It is as difficult to live with a cheapskate as it is putting up with a squanderer.

SUGGESTION #6

DO NOT MARRY A LIAR.

Of course, no one is perfect and sometimes we fall victim to lies. However, some people use lying as a coping device, a way to get what they want, a method of self preservation or an ego-building tool.

Jesus said, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). The Lord was not only referring to the ability to be responsible here, He also includes the ability to be faithful or "true" in one's handling of matters dealing with honesty and integrity. If he continually breaks his word over small things or if she never follows through exactly on what she says, this person has a problem with truth. A good marriage cannot be built unless there is a willingness to tell the complete truth at all times. Unless there is trust that the other person's word is solid, you will always be in doubt. If you cannot have complete confidence in the other person, enough to put your very life in their hands, do not marry them.

SUGGESTION #7

CAN HE OR SHE HOLD DOWN A JOB?

Sounds old fashioned does it not? But it is a long and miserable life in a marriage with a man who does not like to work, cannot hold on to a job, will not take orders or refuses to improve his skills. It is also very difficult to live with a woman who wants to get married only so she can quit her job or leave home. The Bible does not say anything about women working outside the home, this was very rare in society when the Bible was written. But it does say something about women and work. Paul says that women should be workers at home (Titus 2:5). The idea was that they were not just at home, but they were the keepers of the home. The modern day application is that whether a woman works outside the home or is at home exclusively, she is bound by the same rules of good stewardship as men are in the workplace. This means that she has the responsibility of being the keeper or manager of the household. Going out to work does not absolve her of this responsibility, it means that the couple has to be more creative and cooperative in fulfilling the needs of the home.

If your prospective partner likes to sleep too much, play too hard, and hates their job or work in general, prepare to be poor, prepare to carry the load by yourself and prepare to spend a lot of time regretting the day you said, "I do."

SUMMARY

I am sure that many of the married couples and those who have married off children who are reading this book could add another 20 suggestions. For example, do not marry on the rebound, do not marry someone you love but do not like, do not marry someone who will not communicate with you, do not marry a flirt, do not marry someone with a bad temper, and so on and so forth.

Personally I believe all the suggestions to avoid divorce before you marry can be summarized into one single positive sentence: Marry someone who loves Jesus. If the person you marry loves the Lord, then:

- They will love and obey His word.
- They will serve His church.
- They will know how to love you and your children with Christ's love.
- They will never leave you, for any reason.

If they love the Lord, these things are standard equipment. No marriage with Jesus Christ as Lord of both partners has ended in divorce.

12.

Divorce Busters

Part 2

DIVORCE-PROOFING YOUR MARRIAGE

In the previous chapter we reviewed seven suggestions to help single people avoid divorce once they entered into marriage:

1. Marry a strong Christian.
2. Consider seriously your parents' objections.
3. Observe how your partner's parents treat each other.
4. Do not marry a drinker or drug user.
5. Observe how your partner handles money.
6. Do not marry a liar.
7. Make sure your future spouse can hold down a job.

Those reading this who are already married may have said, "I wish I would have known this 20 years ago before I said 'I do!'" With this in mind I offer part two on this topic dedicated to those who are already married and who want to protect their existing marriage from divorce.

Young unmarrieds have a lot of energy so they can take seven suggestions pertaining to their love life. Married folks are probably a little more worn out so I only have three suggestions for you concerning divorce prevention.

SUGGESTION #1

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONTRACT AND A COMMITMENT.

Too many divorces take place because people do not understand the fundamental difference between these two types of agreement.

A Contract

A contract is a legal arrangement between two parties to render services, products or conduct according to the terms of the document. A marriage contract is a legal arrangement between a man and a woman to live as husband and wife, and fulfill certain duties regarding children and property. Like all contracts, there is an escape clause in case things do not work out. In a marriage contract this escape clause is called divorce. Many who see marriage as nothing more than a contract think nothing of using the escape clause when things do not suit them. This is becoming the basic attitude about marriage in society today.

A Commitment

A commitment is a promise, a vow, a covenant that one person takes upon himself/herself. When you commit, you are promising that regardless of what other people do, you will maintain the commitment that you have entered into. In other words, your behavior is based on your commitment, not the other person's behavior.

In a marriage context, a commitment is the promise to continue being a faithful spouse regardless of the circumstances. In a marriage commitment there is no escape clause other than the partner's death. Yes, Jesus added adultery (Matthew 19:8-9) and Paul added abandonment (I Corinthians 7:15) as legitimate reasons to dissolve the marriage contract, but this was because of sin. However, the only legitimate "out" is the death of the partner (Romans 7:2). When God instituted marriage at the beginning, it was with the idea that both partners would be committed to each other until death (Matthew 19:6). Marriages end in divorce because the partners only see themselves in a contracted union instead of a committed union. This commitment means that the individuals in the marriage are:

A. Committed to Fidelity

A sincere commitment in marriage is expressed as absolute and complete fidelity to the partner. Regardless of how our partner acts, we never have a legitimate reason to be with another.

B. Commitment to Love

Many times, there is no love in a relationship because we have stopped putting our love into it. Marriages thrive on love and a commitment to a spouse is not simply a commitment to keeping our body in the marriage, but also a commitment to keeping our heart there as well.

C. Commitment to Serve

Many marriages fail because of simple neglect. The job, the hobby, the friends, or the family take precedence over the marriage to the point where it decreases in importance. If you are married, your marriage is your number two priority (Christ is always first). It is before work, family, hobbies, even before church.

If you understand what commitment is, then you will not consider divorce as any kind of solution when life becomes difficult. For example, a man with a wife who is incapacitated because she has begun to suffer from depression or some other physical handicap that interferes with the couple's usual level of sexual intimacy, does not consider putting her away because she no longer can meet his needs. The marriage commitment requires fidelity in times of sickness as well as times of health. This promise, made when we speak our vows, is not just empty poetry but an actual promise to be true even when our spouse is no longer themselves due to illness or accident. Marriages do not need more money or sex to survive, they need commitment as the rock-solid foundation upon which the relationship can be built.

SUGGESTION #2

GET HELP!

So many people come to see me after they have called their lawyer or after their partner has left them. This is usually too little and too late. People are sinners, and when you put two sinners together in a relationship for life there is bound to be trouble. Most times people can

work things out by themselves but there are those instances when a couple arrives at an impasse, a deadlock, a standstill or a cycle that they cannot seem to break. In a situation such as this it is necessary to:

A. Swallow Your Pride

Many couples will stay in their misery because they are too proud to admit that they are in trouble, and they need help. Men are usually more guilty of this than women. Men hate to admit that they have failed somehow and may need direction. Sometimes one of the partner's attitude is, "There is nothing wrong with me, you are the one with the problem." If you have said that your marriage is in trouble and that means you are in trouble and need help.

B. Get Christian Counseling

There are many counselors, but only Christian counseling will help you redesign your marriage relationship according to God's plan in the Bible. Secular counselors want to lead you to the point where you will do what you really want to do (and this may even include divorce). Christian counselors will help you know and do what God wants you to do. In the end this not only brings peace to the relationship, but also peace of mind.

C. Be Patient

Troubled marriages usually require changes on the part of both parties, and change is often slow and painful. It usually takes time to work yourself into marriage problems, and it also takes time to work yourself out of them as well. Give the process time to work in both your life and your marriage, the results will be worth the wait. Most problems that separate people in marriage are fixable given the right attitude and teaching. Couples who are in trouble and seek help early need to trust Jesus' promise that, "with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). Even marriages that seem hopelessly damaged can be restored if only the couple would trust in Jesus who is the Lord of hopeless causes. If God can resurrect Jesus from the dead, He can also resurrect a dead relationship.

SUGGESTION #3

LEARN TO FORGIVE.

Divorce is the final refusal to forgive. I say final refusal to forgive but not the first one. A divorce is usually preceded by a long series of unforgiven offenses. When we do not bother forgiving or asking forgiveness for our small offenses, we do not learn how to forgive or ask for it when it really counts. There can never be a new start without forgiveness. That is why the first goal for the couple experiencing trouble in their marriage is to begin learning how to forgive one another. This even applies to those who have divorced. There is no healing, no new start or new life until forgiveness has taken place. This means forgiving the other person as well as forgiving yourself.

New life does not begin when you get a new apartment or remarry, it starts when you forgive. Many folks want to forgive but they are not sure what forgiveness really is or how to go about it. Forgiveness is giving up the right to receive a payment that you justly deserve (whether it be the right to an apology, restitution or punishment). In forgiveness, we not only give up our payment, we give up our right to receive payment, or even ask or refer to it ever again. We sign this right over to Christ. The other person now owes Jesus what they previously owed to us. They still owe it, but they do not owe it to us anymore, they now owe it to God in Christ. We have turned it over to Him in prayer, and He will demand it of them at judgment. In return for this forgiveness, Jesus gives us peace concerning the issue (we take our anger, resentment, desire for revenge and hurt, and exchange it for peace of mind concerning this matter). The Lord also gives us forgiveness for our own sins which He transfers from us to Himself as well.

Sometimes the stuff is so old, so complicated, so hurtful that it cannot be untangled and cannot be taken back. We simply need to wipe the slate clean. Forgiveness is the only thing that can do this. Some things a couple cannot forget, but with God's help they can forgive, and that forgiveness permits them to move on and start over.

SUMMARY

At the end of the previous chapter, I mentioned that you could have probably added many more suggestions to what I said, and I suppose that this would be true for this chapter as well. However, I am confident that most divorces that take place, whether they be among Christian or non-Christian couples, could be avoided if:

1. People would enter into the marriage with a "commitment" mindset rather than a "contract" mindset. This would eliminate divorce as an option when things get rough, and motivate the couple to really work on their problems instead of taking what seems like the easy way out.
2. People would not wait so long to get help when they start having problems. We do not hesitate to take our car to a mechanic or our computers to a technician when they malfunction, but we refuse to invest a few dollars in Christian counseling in order to improve or even save our marriages.
3. People need to invest as much emotional energy into forgiving each other as they do in winning the argument or hurting each other. Forgiveness is an integral part of building a healthy relationship, and if you want to live in peace you have to learn to ask for and give forgiveness because forgiveness is the best kind of closure.

13.

Love and Marriage

Isn't it ironic that in this day of Oprah and Dr. Phil, in a time where there are all kinds of marriage preparation seminars and countless books on how to be happily married, the rate of divorce continues to hover between 40 and 50 percent? Isn't it also amazing that despite the fact that people wait longer to be married, prepare more for it socially, even experiment with cohabitation before marriage, counseling offices can't keep up with unhappy married couples? Despite the many who fail at marriage, however, we continue to marry (USA, 3 million weddings - 2015) because we believe that it is within marriage that the greatest potential for happiness and fulfillment is found.

I have entitled this chapter, "Love and Marriage" because I want to focus on the key ingredient that makes a marriage wildly successful, and that is love. There are many ideas about what love really is, and what it feels like. However, if you want to succeed in marriage you have to cultivate a certain kind of love and this is the type of love I want to describe.

UNDERSTANDING LOVE

I never met a couple who wanted their love to last only a little while. Everyone wants the experience of love to last a lifetime. Some people marry and remain faithful to one another but eventually stop loving each other. It is difficult to be married to someone you do not love. My mother used to say that love was like a flame, it burned brightly so long as it was fed.

I agree with this idea but would add that it also depends on the kind of love you are feeding in your marriage. When it comes to love, we have many ideas concerning its nature and application. For example, someone will say that he loves pizza and also loves his wife. It is strange that in the English language we use the same word to describe how we feel about both pizza and our spouses, and be quite sincere in saying it.

The Greeks, on the other hand, had a very precise language (I say this because Greek was the original language of the New Testament). They had different words that described the different kinds of love experienced by people.

THE WORDS USED TO EXPRESS LOVE IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE

A. *Eros* - Referred to sensual love, that which gratified the senses (art, music, sex, physical activity, sport). Love based on the idea that we love what will give us physical pleasure in some way, especially sex. Eros was the Greek god of love. For example: I love baseball, music, sex and forms of physical pleasure.

B. *Phileos* - The word for brother or brotherly love. This word refers to the need for intimacy and sharing. It includes our cherished feelings for acquaintances, neighbors or working for a common cause (in politics), to the highest form of phileos, which is friendship. Phileos also refers to the love of humanity which is often expressed in the word, "philanthropy." Phileos is the word for the love that brings people together because of shared interests, goals or needs. For example: I love my buddies; I love the poor.

C. *Storgos* - The Greek root word for the idea of home. It refers to the love that exists because of family relationships. This word expresses the feelings between those who have a blood relation. Storgos is based on common heritage, social structure, common experience, the love of country or heritage. For example: I love my mom, my kids, the USA.

Now, we experience all of these types of feelings in some way within marriage: We have eros (sexual love within marriage); phileos (bonded friendship within marriage), and storgos (the development of family within marriage). These types of love, however, are all based on things that are outside of ourselves.

- Sex is stimulated by our need for gratification by the other.
- Friendship is based on things we share.
- Family is produced by adding another.

As good as these things are, they are not the source of love, they are merely the experience of love. They are not, in themselves, what makes love grow. They represent the ways we express and experience love. For the source of love, however, we must go to God because the Bible says that He is love (I John 4:16).

THE SOURCE OF LOVE IS NOT SEX, FRIENDS, OR FAMILY - GOD IS THE SOURCE.

When we understand the nature of God's love then we will know how to begin love and feed the love that keeps our marriage relationship alive and wonderful.

The Kind of Love Expressed by God

When the New Testament writers began to describe God's love for man in Christ, they introduced an obscure word that was rarely used in Greek literature: the word "agape." This Greek word described the dotting kind of love that a father would have for an only child or a special child. Today we might refer to it as indulgent love, the kind that grandparents often shower their grandchildren with.

The writers of the New Testament used this word because the nature and expression of God's love for man did not fit the categories defined by the usual words for love that had been used in the past (eros, phileos, storgos). The challenge that they faced was to find a word that described a kind of love that had never been seen or experienced before. A word for love that could reference God sending His only perfect Son to die for those who hated and disobeyed Him in order to save them.

This type of sacrificial love was not based on shared experiences, physical pleasure or common heritage; it was a love that gave without condition, and the word "agape" seemed to capture the spirit of the action in a way that the other words could not. This is why every time the word love is used in the New Testament, except for one occasion, it

is used to translate the Greek word “agape.” The reason for this is that there are great differences between human love and agape love. For example:

A. Agape love is not stimulated by self-gratification, intimacy, beauty or shared interests. It is produced by a response of obedience towards God. He says, "Love your neighbor" and we do this as an act of obedience, not because our neighbor is nice, or shares our skin color or interests. Our neighbor has nothing to do with our loving him. Our love for him is based on our obedience to God. Just as Jesus' death for us was not based on our loveliness or worthiness, but rather on His response of obedience to the Father (Jesus loved [agape] the Father and so He obeyed until death).

B. Agape love begins with an act of our will, not a feeling in our flesh. We can love those who are unlovable, those with whom we have little in common, those who don't want or deserve our love because we decide to do it, and not because we feel like it.

C. Human love pleases man and is for man's pleasure. Agape love pleases both man and God because it injects God into every relationship. When we love as God loves, we become the channel through which God blesses others.

If we are to succeed at marriage with on-going love, we need to be expressing agape love not just eros, phileos and storgos type of love.

AGAPE LOVE AND MARRIAGE

I mentioned before that human love is not the source of love, merely the expression of love. This experience is fragile and temporary being subject to age, illness and misunderstanding. When the reason for human love dies, many times so does the love. For example, when virility and beauty go, so does sex. When we hurt each other's feelings, our friendship often dies. Many marriages lose their joy or even fail once children are grown and gone.

Godly (agape) love, because it is based on a conscious decision to offer our love to our partner without conditions for life, is the oil that keeps the flame burning no matter how the situation changes. Agape is the

only kind of love that will survive and support this promise. It is because we are ready to offer agape love that we can promise to love and be faithful to our partner, "In sickness and in health, for better or worse until death do we part."

Agape love is effective because it was this kind of love that drew all of us to Christ in the first place, and it is this kind of love that keeps us faithful to Him until death.

WHAT DOES AGAPE LOOK LIKE?

I think that most people, when they hear this, say, "I want some of that agape love; what does it look like in practical terms? Describe it to me as a human being so I can practice and experience it for myself." Paul describes the actions and reactions, as well as the personality and character of agape love in that beautiful passage contained in I Corinthians 13, when he says, "love is patient, love is kind...", he is actually saying agape love is patient, agape love is kind, etc. Let us review this passage more closely in order to draw a clearer picture of this kind of love:

- Agape is patient - Willing to bear another's weakness without complaint, anger or discouragement.
- Agape is kind - Willing to serve with good acts.
- Agape is not proud - Does not overstate one's own worth or considers oneself better and worthy of honor.
- Agape is not rude - Acts politely, is considerate and has an honorable lifestyle.
- Agape is not selfish - Does not only consider one's own needs and desires.
- Agape is not sensitive - Is not easily offended, easily angered or impatient.
- Agape is not vengeful - Does not keep score.
- Agape loves justice - Wants good to win.
- Agape forgives - Ready to cover the other's mistakes rather than point them out.

- Agape is trusting - Not blind or gullible, but does not give in to every suspicion either. Gives the benefit of the doubt.
- Agape always hopes - Hopes that eventually the best will come out in the partner.
- Agape is longsuffering - God's type of love is willing to endure another's failings for a long time without becoming impatient or frustrated.

When examining your relationship, your love and your marriage, don't list how often you feel good or how many times you've had sex in the last month in order to measure success. Don't review if what you're doing together is satisfying or meets your needs as a way of determining if your love is alive.

Examine your love in light of I Corinthians 13 and see if agape love is the type of love that you are cultivating. If you are not, these other things cannot be sustained or revived if in decline. If, on the other hand, agape is what you are both striving for, then these other things will flow naturally as a result.

SUMMARY:

HOW DO WE KEEP LOVE ALIVE IN OUR MARRIAGE?

1. Decide that from this moment on we are going to love our partner not because of what they give us but because this is what a child of God does. We love as a response to God's command, "the one who abides in love abides in God." (I John 4:16).
2. Begin to practice agape love in your marriage. God will strengthen you in patience, kindness, etc. if you ask Him. Paul's encouragement in Ephesians 3:20 tells us that agape love is possible for all who seek it through Christ, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask.." (if we ask God to help us give and receive agape love, He will absolutely answer that prayer beyond what we could hope for).

Remember, this type of love must be cultivated because it goes against our natural desires and tendencies, and marriage is God's creation where we are placed in order to learn how to agape.

God promises in His word that if you do this, your love will remain alive, not only for the life of your marriage but forever. Paul says, "Love [agape] never fails." (1 Corinthians 13:8). If you love in this way, your marriage will never fail as well.



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